

# Passing Notes

**ParkmontSchool**  
Sessions 3-5, 2019-2020

**CORONA EDITION**

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STORY!



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Who are these masked men and women? Parkmont's intrepid staff meets on-site in September to plan for the 20-21 school year.

## Parkmont Runs Rings Around Coronavirus

Social distancing? Parkmont School? For a small school that knits tight relationships for learning, the schoolhouse closure and advent of remote learning in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic threw Parkmont for a loop. It was March. Parkmont teachers and students started working on tying it into a bow — right away. As the 2020-21 school year gains momentum, the foundation laid is providing lift for Parkmont Home School.

Before students left on the last day before the Covid closure, Troy Burki had shown them how to sign on to Zoom, the voice-video interaction platform. But that was just a prelude. Teachers took a couple of days to think through the challenge and find ways to keep the learning lights illuminated. The faculty's long experience with innovation in teaching methods, finding new angles on courses, and

going the extra mile paid dividends. Sam worked out ways to keep students active with fitness. Juggling made its way into the curriculum and balls were delivered to students' homes. Bridget got students designing homes for imaginary clients. The annual Parkmont Poetry Festival morphed, but could not be stopped. Nijole helped students turn their quarantines into artistic expression. Circumstances will continue to put Parkmont to the test. Parkmont will change and stay the same to ensure students maximize their growth and learning. ■



Parkmont students and staff convene via Zoom for announcements and a digital dance party.

Parkmont's calendar is available at [Parkmont.org](https://parkmont.org). Click here!



## Student Journals Tell Of Covid Times

By Nijole Gedutis

On March 18, 2020, the first day of Parkmont Home School, students wrote their first “Corona Chronicles” entry. For the next two and a half months, students detailed day-to-day life in lock-down. They posted pictures of their work-spaces and of objects in their homes that bear special significance to them. They recreated famous paintings, using only what they had easy access to. They wrote about concerns and hopes and people they love and places they want to go. They wrote haikus about springtime in quarantine and gave themselves shout-outs and responded to the protests that gripped our city, country, and world.

By June 11, they had written 50 entries, documenting these unprecedented times with thoughtfulness, humor, and curiosity. We’re hoping to keep the chronicles going as we move through the year. They are bound to be just as interesting!

### Journal entries:

#### Conor

I think that we will remember the Coronavirus pandemic as a time of stress and hardships. I think this because lots of changes were imposed on people and it was, in my

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*The Old  
Guitarist by  
Pablo Picasso  
and Jackson.*



*Self-Portrait Dedicated to Dr. Eloesser by Frida Kahlo and Mekdi.*

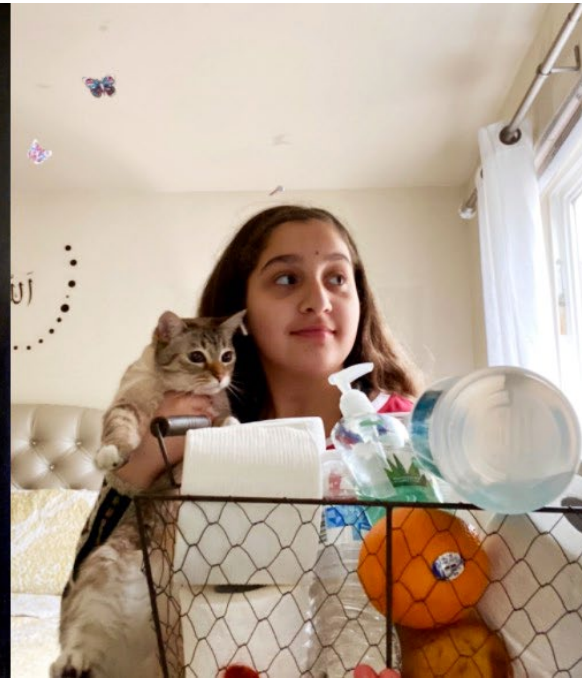
opinion, a very difficult time. I also think that this might show the darker side of some of our citizens and just how far they'll take their patriotism, considering how some people refused to socially distance and were very hostile. If I had to submit an artifact from this time to a museum, I would probably send them a mask, as it symbolizes the changes we went through during the pandemic.

### Arseima

If I had to send in an artifact to a museum from this pandemic, I would choose the entries in my Corona Chronicles because that is where I wrote all the things I felt and did while in quarantine. The Corona Chronicles are like a pandemic diary for me. They help me think and when quarantine is over I can read them for fun. I never had a diary before and I think more people should keep one. Another item I would send as an artifact is a mask because it represents people trying to make their own DIY versions and how hospitals needed a lot of protective equipment. I would also send







*Boy [Girl]  
With a Basket  
of Fruit by  
Caravaggio  
and Butheyna.*

in the Black Lives Matter posters because they represent how people of color had to fight for their rights and how people were exposing corrupt policies. It will also represent how police thought they had enough power to kill innocent people without any evidence.

### **Haikus:**

The busy streets are empty  
warm bright sun shining  
But there's no one to warm up

Things I do for fun  
Puzzles help to pass the time  
Games online with friends

Staying home all day  
People clearing shelves at stores  
The world's been insane ■



**Matthew Frank's  
re-creation of  
Jared by Jordan  
Casteel.**



2020 on Ron's  
deck with his  
quarantine team.



## Headlight: Two-Score Memoir

By Ron McClain

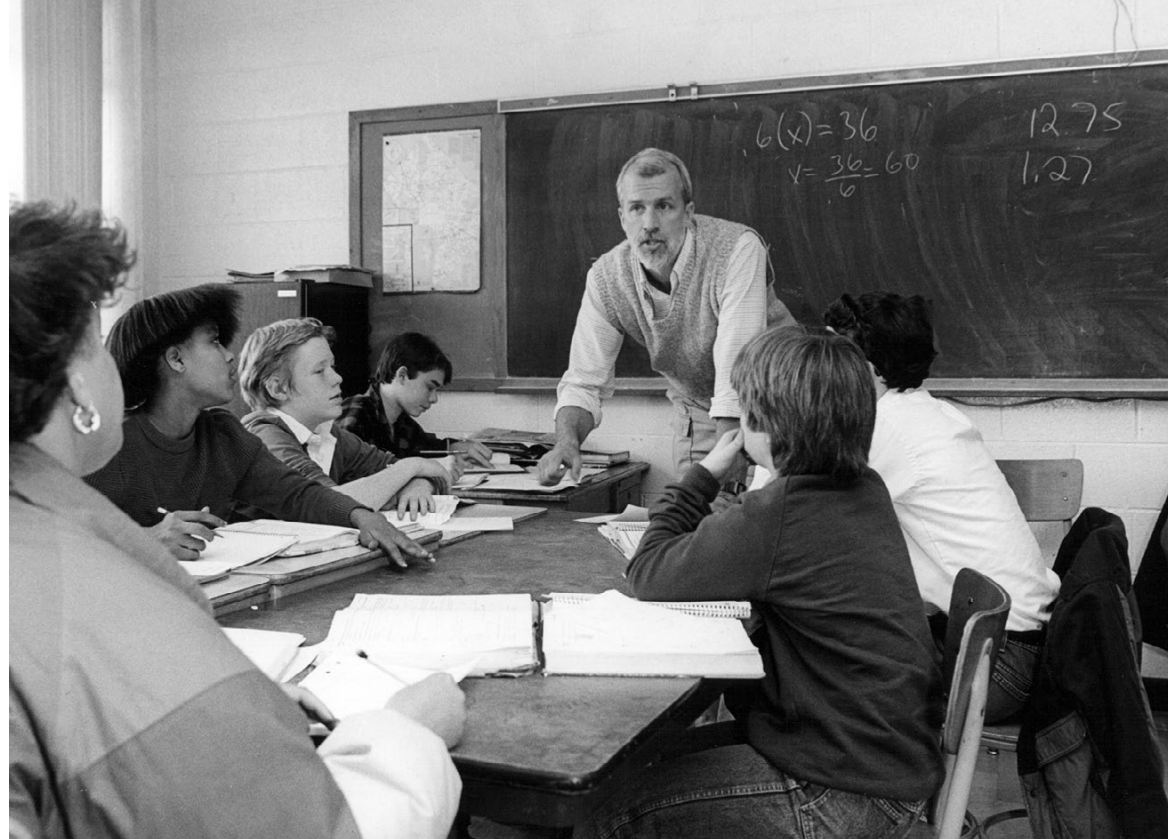
Forty years ago this past July I was given the keys to 1640 Wisconsin Avenue by Parkmont's departing administration, and I started my first year as Head of our then-middle school of 42 students. Four months prior, Barbara Patterson, Executive Director of the Black Student Fund, had called to suggest that I apply for the job. I'd been her daughter's advisor at Somerset, and they'd left Parkmont the previous December after 60% of the staff turned over at Thanksgiving. The school was nine years old, started by an extraordinarily thoughtful group of Montessori families and educators in Northern Virginia in 1972, who'd also incorporated John Bremer's work with the Parkway School

in Philadelphia into their vision of an urban middle school with hands-on learning and an intimate staff-student community.

Five days after I left Harvard in 1971, I drove into a mountain camp north of Taos, New Mexico, run by the founders of the Edmund Burke School. I met Jean Mooskin that day, and three weeks later Dick Roth (who's been a Parkmont Board member for 30 years now); a year later I joined Burke's staff, then starting its fifth year. I spent the interim year aboard the *Antarna* (Marjorie Meriweather Post called it the *Sea Cloud* when she and E.F. Hutton had it built in 1931), serving as a schoolship for Oceanics Schools. It was quite an exciting year on this 320-foot yacht with 33 sails, exploring the Caribbean with stays in Panama, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and

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At Temple Sinai, 1988.

Key West. Plenty of misadventures and escapades and surprise, all good preparation for captaining Parkmont.

My five years at Burke (which included meeting half of our current Board) were followed by four at Somerset, also in year five when I joined it at the Presbyterian Church on Chevy Chase Circle. Interesting block teaching (one class at a time), extraordinary freedom for students, and enough vans for the whole school to get on the road simultaneously. My brother and I took 10 students on a 10,000-mile road trip to Acapulco and central Mexico in 1979 that lasted a month. All staff took year-end travel classes, and mine included England, New Mexico, the Eastern Shore (biking), and backpacking in the Smoky Mountains.

Parkmont is always looking for adventures, and running it has been an adventure itself:

- We moved three times in my first decade before the eventful merger with Somerset that gave us a permanent home on 16th Street.

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- We shifted from a parent co-op governance model to that of a self-perpetuating Board in 1985, which has resulted in our having the most experienced Board in the independent school sector (including 200 years of Board experience collectively at Parkmont and 230 years of independent school teaching and leadership shared amongst the members).



1980s raft trip on the Lehigh River.

- In 1981 (with Linda Mackenzie leading the way) we started an internship program that has introduced more than 1,200 students to the world of work where they've volunteered more than 250,000 hours since the program's implementation.
- We created the Parkmont Poetry Festival in 1982 to celebrate the literary gifts of Washington's young people and bring them together from eight wards and diverse backgrounds to share their art. Since then, the Festival has welcomed work from 18,000 young poets and honored 1,600 winners at our annual event.
- We've travelled hundreds of thousands of student-miles in our quest for Parkmont Classrooms, making the Everglades, Grand Canyon, Carolina Coast, Smokies, Shenandoah Valley, Alaska, and now Puerto Rico, part of our curriculum.
- We've had extraordinary help from 100-plus energetic teachers. The stability of the staff has only grown over time, making the current blend of folks — both experienced pros and those still able to climb any mountain — exciting to work with.

And for so many years, we've appreciated the gifts that come from being a small school where learning about who we are and who we can be is part of the curriculum for all involved. ■



## Parkmont Welcomes New Faculty

### Mariam Haidar

Hailing from the Metro Detroit area, I graduated with a degree in Astrophysics from the University of Michigan. Today I'm a math, science, and art teacher here at Parkmont! I was inspired by my service as an education volunteer with the Peace Corps in Tanzania, so I came to Parkmont in 2020 to continue working and connecting with students. When I'm not teaching, I'm illustrating comics, playing my ukulele, hanging out with my cat, Tiger, and scheming new trips to take during breaks. As a venturesome soul, I am excited for everything Parkmont offers!



### Anthony Muehlberger

I joined the Parkmont team this year, teaching math and science in the upper school program. I worked for 20-plus years at Emerson Preparatory, another small, local, private high school with a unique character, where I was a science and math teacher, as well as the Dean of Faculty, and the Associate Head of School over the years. Parkmont seemed like a natural fit to continue with the style of teaching, students, and community that I had connected so strongly with over those years — offering small class sizes, a welcoming and connected faculty, and a focus on engaging whole students, rather than just pushing for academic excellence. I have lived in Adams Morgan or Mt. Pleasant my entire time in DC. I like science, math, sci-fi, games, sports — and was very active in the ultimate frisbee scene of DC (until the pandemic, so it is one of the things I look forward to most on the other side!). ■



Rob Allen (on left) transitions to post-Parkmont life. That just leaves siblings and current students Faith and Kahlil Dawson-Martinez.

## 2020 Graduation: Parkmont's Big Three

For **Rob Allen**, **Henry Rosser** and **Graham Velsey**, all the hard work paid the grand dividend: a Parkmont diploma. "These are really interesting young men and they've worked very hard to get to where they are today," Head of School Ron McClain said. Despite the challenges of celebrating during a pandemic, their families gathered in June with the Parkmont school team for an online ceremony to recognize their accomplishments and perseverance.

Teachers took turns telling of their contributions to the school community and the quirks of their time learning and hanging out at the corner of Blagden and 16th. Teachers and mentors recognized Rob as one who lights up any room he enters, Henry as a dedicated advocate for his peers, and the musical Graham for his passion for the organ. All three have more education in queue, with Rob targeting Full Sail University in Winter Park, Florida; Henry headed toward Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio; and Graham with his eye on Montgomery College in Maryland. ■



Henry Rosser and his very proud mom a few days before graduation.



Graham Velsey and his parents display his graduation lawn sign.



# Summer Scrapbook



- A** Bridget surfing in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.
- B** Sam and wife, Cielo, in Petworth after moving to the neighborhood this summer.
- C** Zoe and friend at the summit of Mt Katahdin after an intense 9-hour hike.
- D** Erin in a marsh near Bethany Beach.
- E** Matt enjoying a hike in Joshua Tree National Park during 110-degree weather.
- F** Maggie visiting Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens in DC.





A dream kitchen in a soothing beige palette.

## Design/Décor: Joy, Mobility, Color

By Bridget Mullins

In the time of Covid-19, some afternoon classes are Parkmont favorites, simply adapted into a new format. Others have been completely new additions to the curriculum.

One such class was Interior Design. Students used the online platform Planner 5D to learn the basics of interior design and create rooms/homes of their own.

Lessons in the class included topics like learning about zoning in the home, common interior styles, how colors can affect mood and be affected by the position

of the sun, and how furniture and décor should be placed to allow for maximum comfort. Many students compared the work to designing homes in the popular game “The Sims”. Throughout the session, students completed a large home design for “prospective clients” and participated in smaller design challenges. Here is what some of the students had to say about their experience:

**“An important skill that I learned was that red and orange are warm colors and blue and green are cool colors. It was interesting to learn how colors affect people in the home.”** — Noelle

**“I learned that you can’t put a lot of stuff in the living room because you want people to be able to move around.”** — Ameen

**“I learned the difference between an interior decorator and an interior designer.”** — Molly

**“I learned about how colors can affect your mood. Which is quite interesting because the more I’m in a gloomy environment, the more sad I appear to be. So, I’m working on changing my environment to bring more joy into my life.”** — Victoria ■

Bird’s-eye view of a spacious, open living room and surrounding areas.



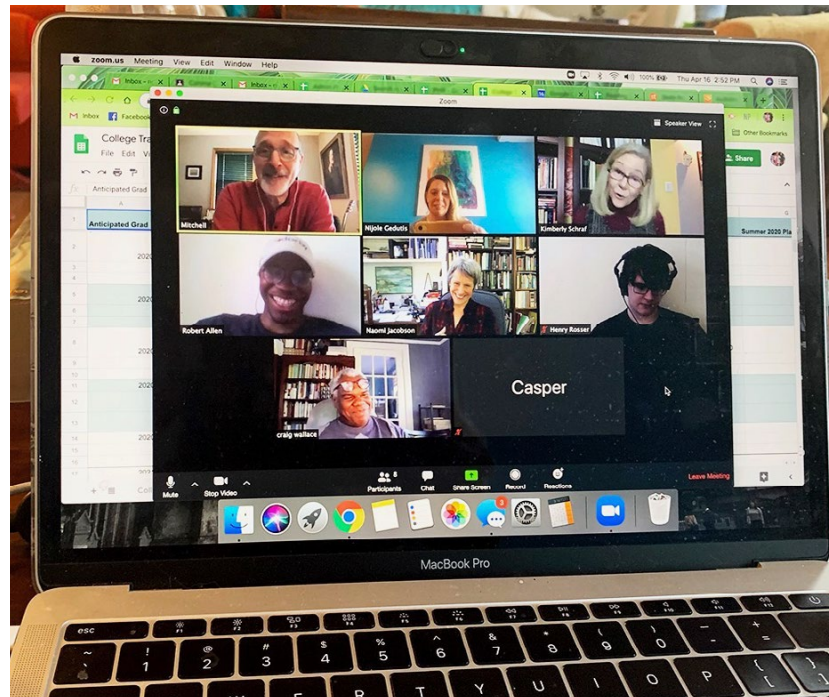


## Ten Minutes of Play Time

By Kim Schraf

For a mere three weeks in March, three upper-school students spent the PM Class hour in pursuit of elusive prey: the ten-minute play. Widely regarded as a subtly difficult form to master, these miniature works aim to span the character development, immersion in a time and place, and narrative arc of a full-length play in just ten minutes. A good ten-minute play delivers rich detail, characters to root for, and a satisfying conclusion. The writers — Rob Allen, Henry Rosser, and Casper Corsello — began with a clean slate, each generated a seed of an idea, and coaxed it into written form over the course of a few weeks. All writing was done in class, after sampling a few published examples of the genre, with real-time feedback thanks to Zoom's chat feature. And lo and behold, they produced three fine ten-minute plays.

Here's where serendipity came in: three eager young playwrights, one teacher with one foot in the D.C. theatre community, three professional actors whose projects had been cancelled due to the pandemic. The actors — Mitchell Hebert, Naomi Jacobson, and Craig Wallace — constitute a sort of casting trifecta in the D.C. community. They Zoomed into our final class and treated the playwrights to live readings of their work. The writers had an opportunity to thank their casts and give feedback on what they enjoyed about the performance. We all agreed that we could have sold tickets! ■



Student playwrights discover that the show must go on. And sometimes that means on Zoom!

## Orb Arc Mastery Class

By Matt McClain

Many years ago, Parkmont formed a circus. Composed of students and run by English teacher Paul Hadfield, the group performed at Parkmont and other venues in the D.C. area. During our Parkmont Home School campaign, we looked to recapture some of that magic with a new afternoon class offering: juggling. I taught the class. I learned to juggle in high school on a trip to England that was chaperoned by Mr. Hadfield. Previous Parkmont exercise classes have incorporated juggling. But this was our first class that focused solely on the art of juggling.

Juggling balls were sent, and in some cases hand-delivered, to students. Our class met three times a week for one hour in the afternoon. We spent the first week getting comfortable juggling two balls. This involved one-on-one instruction, opportunities for students to compete against one another, and a lot of practice outside of class. In week two, we began a series of challenges, where students responded to videos I posted on Classroom. The videos featured tricks that got progressively harder. Students were first challenged to complete 10 and 20 two-ball throws, then three-ball throws, and eventually behind the back, column tosses, tennis, and many other juggling techniques.

Students worked hard in and out of class to perfect their craft, and many will continue to practice through the summer. Juggling is a skill that never really goes away, and we hope to continue promoting juggling at Parkmont in years to come. ■

## Poetry In Motion Pictures

By Kim Schraf

This year's Parkmont Poetry Festival was like no other. Closures due to the pandemic prevented our assembly as a community to hear 40 distinguished students read their winning poetry. We had to think outside the box.

Adversity has a way of galvanizing artists, and this cohort of poets rallied to our request to put their poems on video. Against considerable odds, we assembled clips of students reading indoors, outdoors, at their desks, in their yards, on their phones, laptops and tablets. And they were dazzling!

Public, private, and charter schools were represented: Georgetown Day, Sidwell

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Parkmont's  
calendar is  
available at  
[Parkmont.org](http://Parkmont.org).  
Click here!





Friends, Howard University School of Mathematics and Science, Ballou, Hart, Annunciation, Maret, Gonzaga, Sheridan, School Without Walls, Deal, E.L. Haynes, Field, Washington Jesuit, Banneker, Siena, and Parkmont! Parkmont boasted two winners this year, thanks to Karla Rodriguez (grade 10) and Henry Rosser (grade 12). Their winning poems are shared here, along with our beaming kudos. We are so proud of you both!

To view the video, visit [www.parkmontpoetry.org](http://www.parkmontpoetry.org). ■

### **Great** by Karla Rodriguez

I was just a young girl in elementary school,  
bite sized  
Surrounded by hawks who preyed on the most timid  
and shy  
They chose me  
I would be the one they looked down on  
I was the one that they said "wouldn't be noticed"  
I was invisible  
The rest of my class grew stronger but not me  
They ate good meals and drank fresh milk  
I didn't  
The tall girls wanted to be models when  
they grew up  
I wanted to be an astronaut and fly to the moon  
The boys wanted to grow tall and be  
basketball players  
I wanted to run, run and run, faster than anyone.  
They said I couldn't  
I love my body, I reach zones that other people can't  
I can climb to the tree tops, light as a feather  
I can crouch gracefully, without hitting my head  
I can sleep cozy, covered head to toe  
I'm bite sized but not disabled

### **Slam Poetry About Roadwork** by Henry Rosser

Thank you all for coming to this City Council  
meeting.  
Today's topic will be completing the receipt  
to fill in the concrete that the streets are needing.  
Sitting at the seat of District 3, I feel the heat  
to complete this bill. I've seen it in action; these  
potholes kill.  
*But we need to assess the mess and make sure  
there's no excess in our spending.  
The press is unending when they're  
condescending to us,  
we need our address to be best.*  
Councilman Cress! We still have to try to buy the  
supplies  
so a kid doesn't scrape his knee and cry!  
So a driver doesn't go off-road and die!  
It doesn't matter how much it costs to buy,  
and that's the reason why! Open your eyes!  
*I've opened my eyes! And by the by,  
you need to get your head out of the sky!  
Use your head and calculate the overhead  
expenses!*  
*Until then our defense is to put up signs stating,  
"Road Work Ahead!"*

*That will stop everyone from ending up dead!*  
And what if you're wrong, Councilman Cress?  
Is that your best guess to avoiding the mess  
we would get into if this isn't a success?  
We'd have to confess to the press about the mess!  
The stress would put this administration to a halt!  
So if someone skids on the broken asphalt,  
it'd be your fault!  
*Councilman Galt! You're treating this problem  
like it's an assault! Pole vaulting over the arguments  
I provide! It's like you're hiding the fact  
that you want our treasury to default!*  
Cress! Galt! I need to establish order in this  
meeting.  
the debate is heating, and I don't want anyone  
to be pressed into halting their best verbal  
assaults!  
This meeting is adjourned, I hope we've learned  
a bit more of where everyone's concerned.  
We'll come back in fifteen minutes.

## Internship: Pedals, Gears, Wheels

By Ethan Kuhnhehn

“The World is Our Classroom.” This Parkmont mantra is lived out in our field trips, campouts, and adventure trips, but also in our school’s unique internship program. Junior Nahom Zemedkun spoke to me about the power of his internship experience, and what it means to learn on the job, and outside the classroom.

Before the pandemic shuttered the program, Nahom had spent the previous six months working up to eight hours a week at Gearin’ Up, a community bike shop and service center in Eckington. Under the tutelage of manager Keith Jackson, Nahom learned how to disassemble a bike, troubleshoot for problems and reassemble the parts. While he studied the mechanics of the gear systems and the correct way to patch a tire, Nahom would listen and talk with Keith, someone he views as more a life coach than manager. Keith tasked Nahom with a variety of responsibilities and a “neverending list” of things to do, but would also challenge Nahom on a personal level, with discussions about what it means to grow up, and what to expect and prepare for as he nears adulthood. Nahom would often spend his free time at the shop, working on an old bike that Keith had offered him. Prior to his internship, Nahom had never learned to ride a bike. Midway through the year, he began to show up to Parkmont on two wheels, proudly showing off the accomplishment to his friends and teachers.

Since 1981, Parkmont’s internship program has been providing students with mentorships and the opportunity to learn skills that can’t be taught in a conventional classroom. Nahom’s experience at Gearin’ Up exemplifies the relationships that students can form with their managers and coworkers while they also add important tools to their belt in preparation for life after high school. ■



Nahom acquires some new skills and a taste of the small-business world at Gearin’ Up.



## PE Pandemic

By Sam Gaul

Physical education has always been a core aspect to the philosophy of Parkmont School, whether it be for a “sports” afternoon class, a hike in Rock Creek Park, or an activity-filled field day at nearby Carter Barron field. As we switched into Parkmont Home School, this part of our program was completely derailed — at least at first.

This spring, we formed our “PE Teams.” Once or twice a week, groups of students met along with teachers to get exercise in a variety of ways. Matt and Ethan led a meditation and yoga group in Team Zen. Troy and Alex worked on getting “swol” in Team Feats of

Strength. Dance moves abounded with Willa, Nijole, and Marelle in Team PopSugar. The full body workout challenge was led by Bridget and Sania in Team Madfit. Along with Zoe, I led a running/biking/walking class on Team StravaClub.

Each group took an individual approach to incorporating fitness and physical health into our lives, something that, at least for a moment, we felt like we’d lost touch with during our respective quarantines.

Our group was focused on talking about strategies for how to get moving outside on our own. We would record our runs/bikes/walks on Strava (a popular movement tracking app) and break down our accomplishments from the past week, talk about our difficulties, and make plans for upcoming exercise goals. Personally, it was great to be able to share my passion for running with students. I wanted to help motivate them to start forming their own healthy fitness habits to carry into the summer, and hopefully into many years to come. ■

At the mid-point of his 9-mile bike ride, Rob pauses for the camera.



Nahom's masked selfie in stark relief alongside Civil War soldiers.



## Book Twists: How I'd Write It

By Willa Reinhard

In my upper school reading group, the Session 4A independent reading project required students to choose from a list of creative writing prompts to illustrate something important about their book. For example, Alex Harry, grade 9, rewrote a passage from his book, *Lu* by Jason Reynolds, from the perspective of another character:

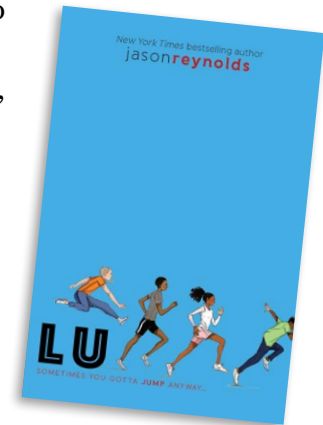
"I had just finished driving my son, Lu, to track practice at the park. The parking lot was full, but we eventually found a spot that was not too far from his practice. We had said nothing to each other during the car ride. I could not talk to him during the ride because I was too nervous to speak. I just couldn't. I killed the engine to the car, and then froze. It had just been so long, and every day it just got worse and worse. But I knew it was the only way to fix this. No matter what happened, I had to give Lu's coach, Otis, his gold medal back. I started to rub my hands together, and then I asked, 'Can I get a minute?'"

"Coach is right there," Lu said impatiently, as he pointed across the field towards a kid and a man. It was definitely Otis.

"I know. But just...," and I was too scared and embarrassed to speak after that.

It looked like Lu wanted to say something to me, but he hesitated a couple of seconds before he said, "You scared to talk to him?"

I was definitely scared to talk to him, but I was also feeling embarrassed. "Scared to talk to him," I barked. "Yes. And... and... and... em-embarrassed." I realized I had just stuttered. I had not done that for over 15 years. I quickly cleared my throat. I looked at Lu and could see in his face that he knew I was embarrassed. He shot me a chin up expression, something I had given him many times before, and then he gave me the medal. As soon as it came into my hands, I felt like I was carrying the weight of a thousand gold medals." ■



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