

# HOO S A C



FALL 2021



# HOOSAC TODAY

FALL 2021

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Inspiration is the theme for this issue of *Hoosac Today*. Sometimes it is such a small gesture that inspires enormous change. For George Verschoor, it was the offer of a place to stay; for Colman Aucoin, it was an act of good sportsmanship; for Adesewa Egunsola, it was in becoming a student leader that she found her later calling. In short, you never know who you will inspire by that next simple act of kindness or generosity. This issue is dedicated to those who make the effort and to those who strive to achieve.

*inspiration*



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## A MESSAGE FROM OUR HEADMASTER

*Dean Foster*

Inspiration comes in many ways. Often it is sought after, sometimes it is discovered in a happy accident, and sometimes it is created. That creation of inspiration is what I think best describes the actions of the students and faculty of Hoosac School over the last 18 months.

As we started a new year in the Valley of the Owl, it is what we needed more than ever to get things going and into a new normal. The summer had been a respite from the toils required of our previous year, a year by all accounts that was a banner success considering the conditions worldwide.

From whence would that inspiration come? It came from the students who, despite travel restrictions and outright bans, found their way back to Hoosac. It came from those who still could not gain access to the school in-person, committing to remote learning and staying a part of the Hoosac community, although from a great distance. From our teachers, who waded into in-person lessons with the knowledge that we would be in-session potentially espoused once again.

Inspiration was created by the very people that would need it going into the year and create it they did. I have never seen the campus, our campus, our Hoosac, so alive and full of vitality. Students and teachers are expanding their knowledge base and growing the Hoosac academic experience. Coaches and players are putting forth their best efforts to display Hoosac's prowess on the fields.

As you will see in this issue of *Hoosac Today*, inspiration is nothing new to Hoosac. It is evident in the stories of challenges and successes detailed in the following pages. Take some time, read and enjoy, and when you are done, see if you haven't just found a new inspiration.

Be Hoosac!

"Preparatory boarding schools exist not just for the purpose of educating successive generations in academic subjects, but to provide, as well, an experience in the richness which life has to offer... Such a school is, in a real sense, a microcosm of the world community and is peopled by many kinds of individuals who differ in age, background, experience, ideals, purpose, and accomplishments. Yet these many, as they live, work, sorry, and rejoice together, are also one within the character and nature of the particular school to which they belong."

-The Rev. Clinton Blake,  
Rector and Headmaster in 1964

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BUSINESS MANAGER

Kathryn Weaver

HOOSAC SCHOOL

PO BOX 9

HOOSICK, NY 12089

Tel (518) 686-7331 • [www.hoosac.org](http://www.hoosac.org)  
[info@hoosac.org](mailto:info@hoosac.org)

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# Taking Flight

Colman Aucoin '09 was just 17 when his family relocated from Ireland and he was introduced to the tiny prep school on the hill. "Hoosac was like Hogwarts," he said. In Ireland his school had been in the middle of open fields, but upon his first glance of the place, Hoosac was in its autumn splendor, adorned with the bold reds, oranges, and golds of fall. "I was blown away. It was like Hoosac was hidden inside a forest away from everything."

As with many Hoosac students, arriving at the school was Colman's first taste of independence. "I had no idea what I was capable of because I had never lived on my own, or made decisions for myself on which I couldn't get immediate parental advice," he said. "Hoosac was my first taste of adulthood." While he missed his family, he cherished the opportunity to grow: "I was still under supervision, so I didn't make the wrong choices, but I felt free. I felt like I was free to make my own choices in life for the first time."

Colman also learned the value of good sportsmanship while playing soccer at Hoosac. "It was perhaps the start of my desire to do the right thing in life." This defining moment occurred during the New York State Finals, when the Hoosac team was losing 7-1. "I was a striker and got a break away during the game and it was one on one against the goalkeeper. I was sprinting toward him, almost certain I'd score."

Unfortunately, the opposing side's reserve keeper had other plans. "He met me unexpectedly at the top of his box and tackled me, clearing the ball expertly and flipping me in the process."

Colman was so impressed with the maneuver, he said he felt the need to offer a compliment: "I got up and while sheepishly running back toward our side, I congratulated him on a great tackle. Nothing special. I didn't think anything of it, but the following week, the headmaster read a letter at chapel from the mother of that goalie. She wrote about how polite we were as a school, that the sportsmanship we demonstrated as a team meant so much to her son."

When the headmaster asked who it was who had compli-



mented her son, Colman remained quiet. "I don't remember why, but I never put my hand up. But I remember some of my team behind me patting my back." He said it felt good to know he had positively impacted another person. "I made someone's day and for a single game, that kid felt like a superstar. They won and he contributed to that win. It felt good being acknowledged for doing the right thing, and making my school proud, but it was also a small, but unforgettable experience for me as a person."

Following graduation from Hoosac in 2009, Colman relocated to Montreal to begin his studies in political science at Concordia University. He said the first year went well, but as time progressed, he struggled to keep up. "My third year grades were well below standards, I had failed a few classes and was barely passing the rest, and I knew I wouldn't last the way I was going. After that fall semester, I dropped out," said Colman. "It was really hard on me. It was the first time in my life I had failed at something."

Colman had to pack up, leaving those new friends he had made in Montreal to relocate back to Ireland. "I started working as a bartender and moved in with some childhood friends. It wasn't long before I was bored and moved to New Orleans where my brother was living," he said. "Life was fun, but unsustainable. I worked almost 14-hour shifts and was out on the town when I got off. It took just eight months before I was sick of the night life and with no real goals in mind, I decided to join the military."

Though Colman's father and brother were both veterans of the Marine Corps, he decided to join the Coast Guard. "In 2014, I left New Orleans for Cape May, NJ for boot camp and so began the best decision of my life. I served six years, two months and got to live in San Diego, Seattle, North Carolina, and Florida. I visited Peru, Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico. It was the journey I had been chasing my whole life; like-minded people, hard work, constant travel."

Colman started his military career as an E-2, but quickly

found his way Avionics Technician School. "I was working on MH-60 Sikorsky helicopters, operating essentially as an electrician," he said. "I loved being part of aviation - the cool acronyms, flight suits, aviator sunglasses - all of it!"

Five years in and Colman secured an FAA Airframe and Powerplant license which allowed him to work on all US certified aircraft. "I had plans by that time to get out of the Coast Guard to become a full-time aircraft mechanic." It was around this time he learned the GI Bill would pay for flight school. "I was shocked. I had no idea I could use the GI Bill for flying. It was always something that fascinated me, but I thought I'd never be able to afford."

Colman didn't settle quickly on a school. There were more than 100 accepting the GI Bill. "I called every school. I called 10 each week for months until I had spoken with each school." He wanted to be sure the school matched his pursuits and after much reflection, Colman decided on Gateway Tech in Kenosha, WI.

"I left the Coast Guard in May 2020, at the peak of the pandemic, moved from Florida to Wisconsin and started flight school in September. I've never been happier!"

Today, Colman still draws on lessons he learned while at Hoosac: "Hoosac was a large part of how I learned to conduct myself, especially at work with the responsibility of making sure the aircrafts are in flight-worthy condition," he said. "Hoosac taught me professionalism. I remember getting dressed at 17; putting on the tie and sport coat. It was really the first time in my life where I was consistently dressing well and I felt professional. Hoosac instilled within me a confidence to trust myself, to work through my problems, and with the confidence in knowing I could get the job done."

Colman's advice to students is to dream big: "Be as ambitious as you can be. Never stop researching ways to achieve your goals. I have followed a lot of paths for someone my age and have learned that life will almost never turn out how you plan it, but if you accept that, stay positive, and never let a failure stop you; you can achieve anything." -SG



PEOPLE WANT TO THINK THE RICH KIDS LIVE UP ON THE HILL AT HOOSAC SCHOOL. BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT'S UP THERE. WHAT'S UP THERE IS WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO MAKE OF IT. YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY MAKE SOMETHING OF YOURSELF ON THAT HILL.



## George Verschoor LIMITLESS POTENTIAL



**George Verschoor '78** grew up down the hill from Hoosac School. He said he enjoyed his childhood in an era when the television boasted just a few stations. "Everyone shared stories," he said, reminiscing about his hometown. "You know, they didn't have a lot of money, they were common people, but what we had was our character. And that's what I took from growing up there; the stories and experiences you have and the connection to community. Everybody knew everybody," he said. "There was a lot of support that way. You felt safe."

A few weeks at Hoosac and George realized he had had some preconceived ideas about that school on the hill.

"Growing up, there was always this 'Oh, it's the boys' school; it's those rich kids on the hill. I had this bias coming in that that's who these people were."

George quickly discovered the "kids up on the hill" came from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. "I had this bias coming in that everyone was elitist and that was so far from the truth. They were all just like me, but came from Japan or New York or South America. It didn't take me long to befriend these people and realize that in breaking the myth of what I'd heard all those years in the small town, I was learning a big life lesson: Go find out for yourself before you make a judgment about things."

George said in the days before the internet, meeting kids from around the world allowed him to gain a new perspective. "I was just trying to absorb everything and



they were tuning me in to so many new things and ideas and books and culture. It was an explosion for me. And it was scary and intimidating because you realize, 'Wow, I'm not the big fish I was in the little pond; now I'm the little fish in a much, much bigger pond.'"

For George, home life wasn't always a solid foundation. "To be forthcoming, I was really struggling at that time in my life," said George. "My family was separating and I didn't have a home my senior year of high school. I was sleeping at my sister's."

An unstable home life while still a day student meant George found it difficult to focus on school. He said faculty began pulling him aside ushering warnings about expulsion if he didn't get his act together.

"It was a real transitional moment for me; sink or swim," he said. "My survival tendencies said I have to accept that I need to start doing the work or I'm going to lose the one thing I have; this new community and an opportunity for a better future. I ended up living in Lewishon for a month because I didn't have anywhere to go."

School administrators offered George the choice of staying at Hoosac full-time. "That was a huge turning point in my life. I was able to get my grades back up and get some

traction."

George said several members of the faculty inspired him. It was the school's librarian, John Gane, who gave him a place to stay. And another faculty member who spoke of human potential: "He was always saying to me to remember human potential is limitless. I'll never forget that. It was inspiring to me in so many ways."

The added attention and support helped George "quiet all the noise and focus." He said those nudges changed his life.

Coach Dickie was, as George described him, "this Burgess Meredith type character and another huge influence." George was a sound athlete, but Dickie not only encouraged him athletically, he "would help me find value in things outside of athletics. He was a wise man and a wonderful figure to us all. He was probably key to me, you know, the person who had seen hundreds of boys come through and he would tell us: I've seen kids like you and you're going to go one way or you're going to go another. He was very clear about it."

With renewed confidence and a sense of his own character, George improved his grades enough to get into Syracuse University. It was there, he discovered his strength for creating opportunities for himself.



“It sounds simple but there’s so many people that just don’t understand that simple thing... You want to be in the room where it happens. So create the opportunity to be in the room where it happens.”

At Syracuse, George knew he had an affinity for the arts and he had hoped to get into Syracuse’s Newhouse School, but he was turned down. Instead of giving up, George realized his liberal arts degree required 30 electives, allowing him to take courses offered through the prestigious program without being directly enrolled.

“By the time I got to the 30th credit, it was my junior year. Everyone at that point assumed I was part of the school.” And when it was time to choose a director for the school’s senior project, George was elected.

had a very keen sense for photography and then I found out about cinematography and editing, and so I found a love for film and TV.

After Syracuse, George said he moved to Los Angeles with just \$400 in his pocket. “I think all the survival skills I learned at Hoosac kicked in again. There I was in another big pond.”

It was in this spirit of creating opportunity that George ushered forth a vision held by the late Mary-Ellis Bunim and Jonathan Murray for an unscripted television series that would bring strangers together under one roof and follow their stories over the course of several weeks.

“They had this idea, which everyone thought was insane, to go to New York and put real people in a house



“The dean found out I wasn’t even in the school and so he took me into his office and told me I put him in a really bad position and I said, ‘With all due respect, you put me in a bad position four years ago when you didn’t let me in.’” George laughed at the recollection and said today he is part of the Advisory Board for the school.

“I had to figure out a way to get what I wanted and so I did just what I did.”

Enrolled or not, George developed his passion for visual and performing arts. “I found a love. I took this love of story that I found in my hometown and realized I can make a living telling stories. I wasn’t going to write the great American novel, but I did have a visual sense and I

and follow them for 10 weeks. I thought it was great so I jumped in immediately.”

“Getting an opportunity to work at MTV was fantastic. I was the show-runner on the first season of the Real World in New York, and we are credited, between John, Mary-Ellis, and me, with starting the reality television genre, which for better or worse, has had a huge cultural impact.

We didn’t know; we didn’t really understand the scale of that impact. It was a massive cultural shift. And yeah, that was a big turning point in my career. Suddenly, after 10 years of struggling in Los Angeles, we hit a home run.”

George said whatever the project he takes on, his hometown of Hoosick Falls is never far from his heart. “I think everything I’ve done in my career goes back to my roots in Hoosick Falls. I’ve done music shows, like

Nashville Star, that go back to my roots in music. Murder in Small Town X was another big murder mystery that took place in a small town and was absolutely influenced by my community. You know, the sort of sweet, saccharin surface of it and what’s underneath it all. And you know what’s going on behind closed doors. Even as a kid, you’d hear spooky stories.”

More recently George acted as Executive Producer for Extreme Makeover: Home Edition. “It was a series I ran for many years and that show is really what community is all about. Community comes together to help their own when somebody is in need. That was Hoosick Falls.”

When we asked George what the real world is for him, he said it’s a constant quest for truth:

“There’s sort of three sides to every story and I’m really compelled to get at the truth. That’s in everything I do. We’re never going to get to the absolute truth, but at least we’re giving people the opportunity to be heard. And I think giving opportunity to me is the real, real world.

“How do we help people reach their human potential? Allow them to be heard; allow them to grow; allow them to change; allow them to make mistakes, to be imperfect. I think that’s what Hoosac is. I was an imperfect student, but they said ‘That’s okay, go with it.’ Hoosac nurtured the best parts of George and gave him the opportunity to push forward and leave the less desirable parts in the past. “The real world isn’t clean and simple.”

“People want to think the rich kids live on the hill at Hoosac School, but that’s not what’s up there. What’s up there is what you’re going to make of it. You have an opportunity to go up there and make something of yourself on that hill. And I think, for me, as a young man that’s the lesson I had to learn. You have a choice: Don’t blame your parents, don’t blame your neighbors, your community. Be responsible for your actions and make good choices. I did and that’s where Hoosac helped me make those good choices and then it grew and grew and today I feel really blessed with the career I’ve had and the family I have. Hoosac took an imperfect kid and said, ‘We’re going to mold and make something out of this and it’s okay to be kind of a little broken.’”

The advice George offers current students and recent graduates is to learn how to turn weakness and imperfections into strengths and assets. “Create your own opportunities and do not take no for an answer,” he said. “Your job starts at ‘No’ is my motto. When someone gives you a ‘no,’ turn it into a ‘yes’ and don’t make that a painful process; make it fun. I’ve learned to make it into a game.”

“I have a high threshold for pain,” George continued. “And I don’t mean pain by the sense of someone’s twisting your arm. I have amazing patience, I have



amazing tenacity. Pain is not just physical pain; it’s the pain of studying all night and working all weekend when all your friends are playing. It’s an emotional pain. I gave up a lot in those 10 years leading up to the real world. I worked a lot. I worked for free. I took every job I could. I studied, I went to movies, I devoured as much as I could. So when I say a tolerance for pain, it’s that you have a high tolerance for pain and an insatiable desire to learn more. You have to have those two ingredients.”

George said you also have to be humble and patient. When they told him he couldn’t make a show based on following seven strangers around the city, he knew he had to reshape the conversation.

“All right, good. See? They told me I couldn’t do this now, so what do I need to do to prove to them I can do it?” George said he maintains optimism, patience, and above all, stays humble. “Don’t be arrogant. A lot of people will tell you ‘no.’ It’s a gift. There’s a lot of information under the ‘no.’ You have to investigate, ask why they might have said ‘no,’ maybe it’s something about me, maybe I need to learn to be a better writer, better speaker and then I go to it and come back later. It’s just like planting trees. Suddenly you have a forest around you. You take all of those ‘nos’ and turned them into an opportunity to grow.”

*George Verschoor is a showrunner, producer, director, and creator who has worked with Netflix, Fox, National Geographic, MTV, VH1, PBS, HGTV, and more. He is the founder of Hoosick Falls Productions, based in Santa Monica, California. You can catch George’s latest creation, The World’s Most Amazing Vacation Rentals, on Netflix. -SG*



# an advocate

*FROM STUDENT PREFECT TO FAMILY LAW ATTORNEY, ADESEWA EGUNSOLA '12 NEVER STOPPED ADVOCATING FOR OTHERS*

“When I came to Hoosac, I was 13.” Adesewa was not only young, she was far from home. Her father was working with the United Nations in Liberia and her mother with the Ministry of Education in Nigeria. “It was overwhelming. I went from having my own bedroom, living with my family to being in a room with two other girls, who I knew nothing about nor did I share any experiences.”

Adesewa’s sister was attending Lafayette College in eastern Pennsylvania, so when her parents learned about Hoosac School, they felt it was close enough that Adesewa could visit family at the holidays.

“My father was a diplomat so we moved around a lot when I was young. So, when my middle sister was going off to college, my parents thought it would be best if I also went to the United States. I was born and raised in New York for a period of about eight years. So they thought it would be better for me to come back to the US to familiar territory. We were trying to find something that wasn’t overwhelmingly big since I have never really gone to schools that were big.”

Hoosac’s close-knit community and small teacher-to-student ratio was an ideal fit.

Living so far from home at such a young age had an immediate impact. “I honed in on my independence,” said Adesewa. “I was in charge of traveling by myself at the time, I had to be my own advocate, my own voice; I got pushed out of my comfort zone at a very young age, very quickly, very abruptly. My mom always taught me everything’s an adventure, so when it is difficult, I

have to remind myself it’s an adventure.”

Adesewa also said that with so many kids coming from such different backgrounds, there was a sense of equality. “No one is above me and no one is below. Everyone was just a person I could connect with and with whom I could have a shared experience. And that led me to making some wonderful memories that I will always cherish.”

The small school also presented Adesewa with perks. “There was this time when I was on kitchen duty and I was telling Will, the chef, that I didn’t know how to cook. He was like, *All right, come back one day before we prep for dinner and I’ll show you.* I asked him to teach me to make something simple like tacos. We made chicken and beef tacos together and he taught me how to make a cheesecake. He taught me how to cut different vegetables without injuring myself. And I remember having to run to a basketball game, but coming back to see what we had made.” Adesewa added, “I think really trying to connect with people like that and not trying to distinguish myself or make myself feel better than others, really allowed me to give my best.”

Adesewa demonstrated a level of compassion and concern for others that led to a prefect nomination. “I got nominated and I decided to stick with the nomination because I felt like the student voice mattered to our entire experience.” The future lawyer and advocate said she wanted to give students that voice. “And you know and understand the concerns. This is what I can offer.”

While Adesewa didn’t plan to become an attorney at the time, she said her time as a prefect taught her about the importance



*I THINK REALLY TRYING TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE AND NOT TRYING TO DISTINGUISH MYSELF OR MAKE MYSELF FEEL BETTER THAN OTHERS, REALLY ALLOWED ME TO GIVE MY BEST.*

of examining all options. “People say that’s why I’m a good attorney; I continue to go until I know what all the options are for my clients.”

At Hoosac, Adesewa credits Ms. Claudia Stultz with guiding her into a robotics program offered at the time. “She helped me find a program and drove me there. It allowed me to see what it would be like to be an engineer and it was why I ended up going to Lafayette for engineering.”

While in college, Adesewa’s interests broadened. She considered philosophy, government, and eventually found law. She worked early on with farm workers with legal matters relating primarily to immigration and employee rights. Adesewa also worked for the District Attorney’s Office in Philadelphia. “It was a great experience. I think two weeks of training basically and I just got thrown in court.”

Following law school, Adesewa wanted to focus on immigration and criminal law, but found she was needed elsewhere. “The family law litigation department really needed an associate so I started picking up cases and found that it let me get the most writing experience very quickly and got me into court very quickly as well.”

“I realized there was a need there that I could still help people in the same manner,” said Adesewa. Additionally, she works pro bono for the PA Innocence Project, a program reviewing death row cases. “I’m part of the initial review process where I look through the documents and what grounds there may be for a change or reversal in sentencing.” She also provides pro bono help through

the Chester County Bar Association Access for Justice program.

After Hoosac, Adesewa found inspiration in realizing she was not only free to make her own decisions, but she felt confident doing so.

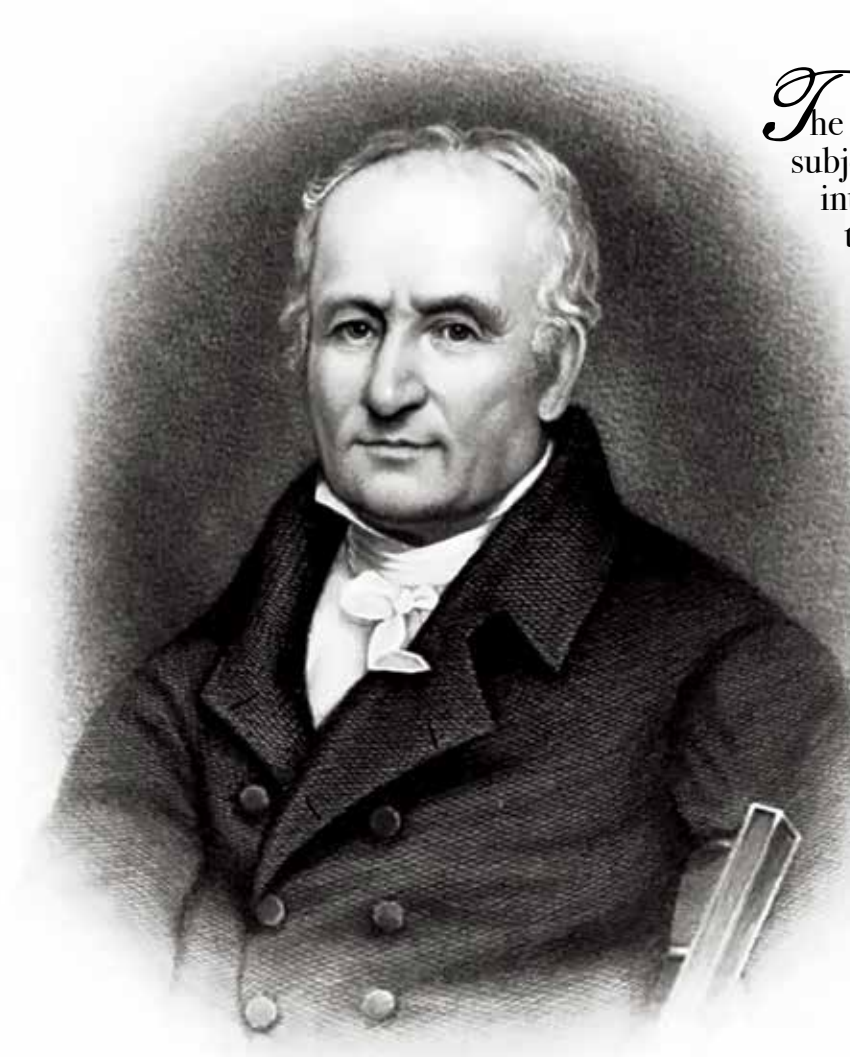
“I thought, boy, I was no longer doing anything for my teachers; I wasn’t doing anything for my parents; I was doing it for me and, you know, being a black female, that’s quite a different perspective because you have this idea that everything we do is for the family; everything you do is for community; everything we do, you know, is the vision that our ancestors never had,” she said.

“So, to have that moment, where I thought I didn’t have all this generational pressure on me, that I could make a decision for myself was truly liberating.”

Adesewa wants students to know they can reach out to Hoosac alumni for guidance. “I know there’s a lot of negative connotations with social media but there’s also so many wonderful things. It really allows them to reach out to other people, it allows them to do their own research, and I think my advice for anybody trying to figure out what their path could be is to do your research. The research really starts to figure out what the world looks like and what it would take to get where you want to be.”

She also said not to get hung up on the little things. “Bad moments don’t have to define you but you can grow from them. Not everything has to be positive to help you get where you want to be. It’s the silver linings you make and the strength in those bad moments that really define you.” -SG

*Adesewa is an associate with MacEtree Harvey in Philadelphia.*



*The soil, my friends, is a subject with which we are intimately connected. It is the source from whence we came; it is the granary from which we are sustained; it is the grave where we are finally to repose. The earth which we cultivate is the same from which we were animated. Today it is man; tomorrow it is dust..."*

*George Tibbits in his address to the Rensselaer County Society for the Promotion of Agriculture and Domestic Manufactures, 1819*

# George Mortimer Tibbits

Tibbits is a name with which all Hoosacians are well-acquainted. Rev. Edward Dudley Tibbits founded the school in 1889; Edward's father, John Bleeker Tibbits, was instrumental in the development of the incandescent light bulb; John's father, George Mortimer Tibbits, constructed the gothic-style castle on the hill; and George's father, also George Mortimer, purchased the land now occupied by the school in 1800. Today, the Tibbits name echoes in its various incarnations from the Hoosic River above which the 846-acre Tibbits (sic) Forest rises to greet the Rensselaer Plateau straight through to Tibbits Avenue in Troy along the mighty Hudson.

The family arrived in the United States from Warwickshire, England in the 17th century, settling on a small point along Providence Bay in what is now Rhode Island. Generations of Tibbits were born at the farm located on a parcel of land then-known as Tibbits Point, including George Mortimer, in January of 1763. His family eventually relocated to Lansingburgh where George would meet Francis Atkinson, a dry-goods dealer from New York City. The chance meeting would change the course of the young man's life.

According to George, Atkinson offered to supply the aspiring entrepreneur with items for a mercantile if he would procure pine and oak timber and deliver it to New York City the following spring. Atkinson did not require any security to back the exchange and George agreed. He made good on his promise and within a year had established himself as a trustworthy and successful merchant.

George would later write: "This act of kindness of Mr. Atkinson, in trusting me without any security, made a deep impression upon my mind, which never has been nor ever will be erased. I was surprised at the time at the confidence which he appeared to repose in me... I have always looked back upon it as the first stepping-stone to my future progress in life."

In 1787, Benjamin Tibbits, George's younger brother, joined the firm as a partner. He would later be joined by another brother, Elisha. A few years later, George married Sarah Noyes and the two relocated to Troy, where George left the business to his brothers and began focusing on his passion for politics and philanthropy.

From 1800 to the time of his death in 1849, George Tibbits acted as a director for the Rensselaer & Saratoga Insurance Company; President of the Rensselaer County Agricultural Society; a director of the Troy Turnpike



"The White House of Nepimore Vale" (known today as Dudley Cottage,) was the summer home of the first George Mortimer Tibbits. Pictured above in 1939, the home had not yet undergone renovations for its use as a dormitory and faculty housing, and is far closer to what it would have looked like when George purchased the property in 1800.



Railroad Company; and also as a director of the Farmers' Bank in Troy.

George served as fire warden, a village trustee, the chief engineer for the local fire department, and later Troy's Mayor. He was elected to the house assembly in 1800, he served as a member of the National House of Representatives within the Eighth Congress from the Tenth Congressional District of New York. He was a member of the New York State Senate from 1815 to 1818. In 1816 and ran for lieutenant-governor of the state on the ticket with Federalist Rufus King.

An early abolitionist, George supported black churches in Troy. Conjecture surrounding the property now occupied by Hoosac School suggests the site was a stop on the Underground Railroad. It is certainly possible given Hoosick's proximity to a convergence of two routes heading north from Albany into Canada.

Also known for his willingness to promote Troy's prosperity, stories abound of projects and initiatives led by George. These included the city's expanded water supply system and protection of the Hudson River waterway to maintain thru-traffic.

Having already amassed a fortune from his business dealings, George's interest turned to land. In 1800, he acquired a large holding in Hoosick which included a small white dwelling and a number of out-buildings constructed by the Tory Col. Francis Pfister just prior to the American Revolution. Col. Pfister lost his life during the Battle of Bennington and his property was seized by the Americans and later sold.

### **Erie Canal, the Troy Turnpike and Railroad Company, and the Hoosac Tunnel**

During this same period, George became an advocate for connecting, via canal system, Lake Erie with the Hudson. He is also credited with the resourcefulness of allocating funds to see the Erie Canal come to fruition. The "Tibbits Bill" was signed by Governor Clinton on April 15th, 1817 and the canal was initiated that same year.

Serving on the Board of Directors for the Troy Turnpike and Railroad Company, George supported a railroad route from Troy to Bennington and was the sole director to vote against construction of a turnpike road in favor of the railway.

The rail system in America was still in its infancy, but George saw value in connecting major hubs via rail for transport of people and goods. According to Grace

Greylock Niles' book *The Hoosac Valley, Its Legends and Its History*, "[George] believed in the proposed Troy and Hoosac Tunnel Route to Boston, and in 1834 he personally engaged Prof. Amos Eaton and his students of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute of Troy to survey a railroad route to the base of Hoosac Mountain in North Adams. Mr. Tibbits, then a gentleman of 70 years, accompanied Eaton's students on foot, sharing the hardships of the expedition with them."

The underpinnings of the Hoosac Tunnel project were underway just prior to George's death in 1849. Groundbreaking occurred in 1851 and the tunnel was completed by 1875.

George's passion for the railroad extended beyond its routes. He was also interested in improvements to the physical rails supporting the trains. Just prior to his death, George met with engineer Loammi Baldwin, who proposed a system made of timber and strap-rail laid over a level rock bed. George purportedly commented, "The time would come when the whole longitudinal structure would be made of iron." If true, this marks the first introduction to the iron t-rail design still in use today.

### **New York State Prison System**

George Tibbits also had a voice within the New York State prison system. Following the death of a female inmate in 1826 at Auburn State Prison, George was asked to join a panel for recommendations for the treatment and handling of prisoners in the state. His subsequent recommendations led to improved treatment of prisoners and the construction of a separate prison to hold female populations. Sing-Sing was completed in 1828 and is still in operation today.

### **On the Nepimore Vale**

George Tibbits maintained his white house on the hill overlooking the Nepimore Vale, spending time away from the business and bustle of Troy whenever he could. It is said his favorite time of day was the quiet of morning and it is easy even now to imagine him walking the grounds as the first light of day spills pink over the horizon.

George died on July 19th, 1849 at his Troy home, leaving his Hoosick property to his eldest son, George. What would he have thought to learn his quiet estate would one day house a school; his old white house on the Nepimore Vale, the students and teachers? Each of these new faces, pausing as George did in the early hours to look out at the bends in the mountains where the river runs reflecting back that pale and pink morning sky. -SG



*This recently unearthed narrative from the Hoosac archive was sent by Richard Leake III '36 in Dec of 2000. Richard's father graduated from Hoosac in 1912 and his grandson, James Higby, is a 2006 graduate of Hoosac School.*

*This 1926 photo shows Burgess Meredith at center stage playing the traditional role of the Boar's Head and Yule Log Jester and may show the young Richard Leake III at left playing the sprite*

Dear Martha Lightcap,

I'm most pleased to receive your card. Townsend Wellington (1928) asked if I had any old photos or memorabilia. I've enclosed some golden oldies I found from my family's old picture albums - my dad was Senior Prefect back in 1912 [*Editor's Note: Mr. Leake was the Senior Class President in 1912; not a prefect*]. I've checked his pictures - captain of football and on second baseball team - also the old photos I've written on the back, what buildings they are or to the best of my memory. The study hall is checked, triple checked as is I think Boaton Hall.

I was a day student at Hoosac - living in Hoosick Falls. John Potts, Harry Wier, and Bud Whipple were also day students. We started at Hoosac as Shell Formers in 1930. My Godfather was the Rev. Dudley Tibbits. He was the founder of Hoosac. My dad always stayed very close to Hoosac. Our family gave the fireplace and

mantle in the present dining room in his honor.

When I was five years old - or maybe four years - I so clearly remember being the Yule Log Sprite and rode the Yule Log through the dining hall up onto the dais. It was a wild ride and I held on for dear life. Burgess Meredith lifted me off the yule log and with me on his shoulders, we danced putting mistletoe on all the candles. I also remember dancing with Father Christmas.

I have many fond memories of Hoosac - playing hockey on Tibbits pond, watching the big crews cutting ice on the pond and sliding ice up a long ramp into the big tremendous ice house - all done by many horses. The selling of ice was big business.

What a pleasure to hear about Hoosac and its newfound success. I'm glad you're there.

Sincerely,  
*Richard B. Leake III*



*Richard Leake's father, Richard Leake II, shown here in his 1912 yearbook photo*



## Jennifer van Alstyne '07



When Jennifer Van Alstyne '07 was little, her mother would drive her past the private school on the hill and tell her about her uncles who had gone to school there. She said her mother would ask her, "Would you like to go to school there someday?" But for Jennifer, Hoosac School was just a mysterious place outside of her hometown of Hoosick Falls. Little did she know, it would someday become a place of refuge during a time of personal crisis.

Jennifer Van Alstyne had to grow up faster than most students. Just before high school, her mother passed away unexpectedly, leaving her with the memories of those trips past Hoosac. In tribute, Jennifer decided to use some of the money left to her to pay for her education. It felt like a new beginning, but after her first successful year at Hoosac, tragedy struck again.

"My father was diagnosed with cancer my second year."

With her mother gone, Jennifer worried about her father's

care. "I had to leave part of both of my sophomore and junior years to take care of my father, so I was doing remote learning," she said. The school provided exactly what she needed to continue her education.

"I needed people who could create that flexibility for me and Hoosac allowed that in ways other schools wouldn't," she said. "My father was going through chemotherapy and treatments and was by himself, so I was going back and helping him by making sure he was getting to his appointments and unfortunately he contracted pneumonia and passed away."

Jennifer graduated a year early, time she needed to process her grief. "I knew I would be successful, but I didn't have a clear path and I wanted to start college with this fresh perspective."

Having experienced such enormous loss, Jennifer knew she wanted to do something in her professional future that would allow her to give back. "I started out as a social work major

and found that the empathy that was needed on my part, like to do the research to do the work, was too overwhelming for me. I think, with the grief that I just processed myself, I was like *Hey, I can help people*. And then I realized it wasn't good for my mental health, so I switched to English literature."

The switch was the first step in a path toward creativity in the field of communications. Jennifer said her experience at Hoosac made it easier for her to communicate with people from varying backgrounds:

"The cultural diversity at Hoosac was massively impactful for me. Living with people is different than just seeing them in classes. In my business now I work with people on nearly every continent, and I'm able to communicate with people from different cultures and meet them where they're at and be patient and also open to whatever their interests."

As Jennifer continued along her higher educational path, she said there was another important lesson she gleaned while at Hoosac: "Professors are real people and being able to talk with them can make a difference for your education."

Jennifer credits professors with helping steer her as her talents emerged. "I was in this program where one of my professors I had taken a poetry criticism course with said, 'Hey, you need to try writing poetry. Come sign up for this other course with me.' He took me under his wing and I feel like it opened my world to this kind of creative side that I didn't realize I had with poetry. Something that I had found wildly unapproachable before became a way for me to communicate my experiences."

Jennifer later began graduate school for her MFA in writing, where she met her fiancé Matthew. Matthew was enrolled in a doctorate program in Louisiana and Jennifer took the opportunity, in addition to completing a second Master's degree in English, to create and launch a new consulting business.

"I was able to talk my department into giving me this new position as a research assistant. Doing professional writing for the department helped me realize I love communicating about

other faculty, about student accomplishments, and focusing on the recruitment side of social media for the University," she said.

Jennifer's business, The Academic Designer, began with a couple of websites designed by Jennifer for faculty. "I fell in love with the practice of learning different business aspects and trying to figure out how to best help people. It's evolved into this training and consulting company. I just love it."

The platform allows her to help people while fueling her passion for communication and helping others. She said she's inspired by the shared success of each project.

"An inspiring project for me involved recommendations that resulted in securing additional funding and helped better communicate the science of what this group was doing which was using nanotechnology to treat water systems around the world and make safe drinking water. What they do is so important and being able to help them feels really rewarding."

Jennifer, like many graduates, worried about impostor syndrome, the feeling successful people sometimes experience when they doubt their own achievements and capabilities. "You feel like you're a fraud or you feel like you don't belong and you're going to be kicked out by someone who finds you out. And I think we all experience that, to some degree. That being said, about a year out of grad school I had a lot more confidence in my business and my skills. I knew how much those skills were worth," explained Jennifer. "And so I had to do a lot of work and learning to be able to gain the confidence I have today. It didn't come naturally and it's very much based on research and talking with other people to find out what's actually working. And I think I've taken that approach my whole life and that's made a difference for me. It's probably something I gained while at Hoosac; being able to ask questions to better understand."

The online business, which relied heavily on video conferencing before the pandemic, is today thriving. "Honestly, the pandemic made it easier for people to feel comfortable communicating with me online. When I first started, people weren't sure how to use Zoom. Now everybody does and it's so normal to go on video and talk with people. In that way, it's made communication for my business easier."





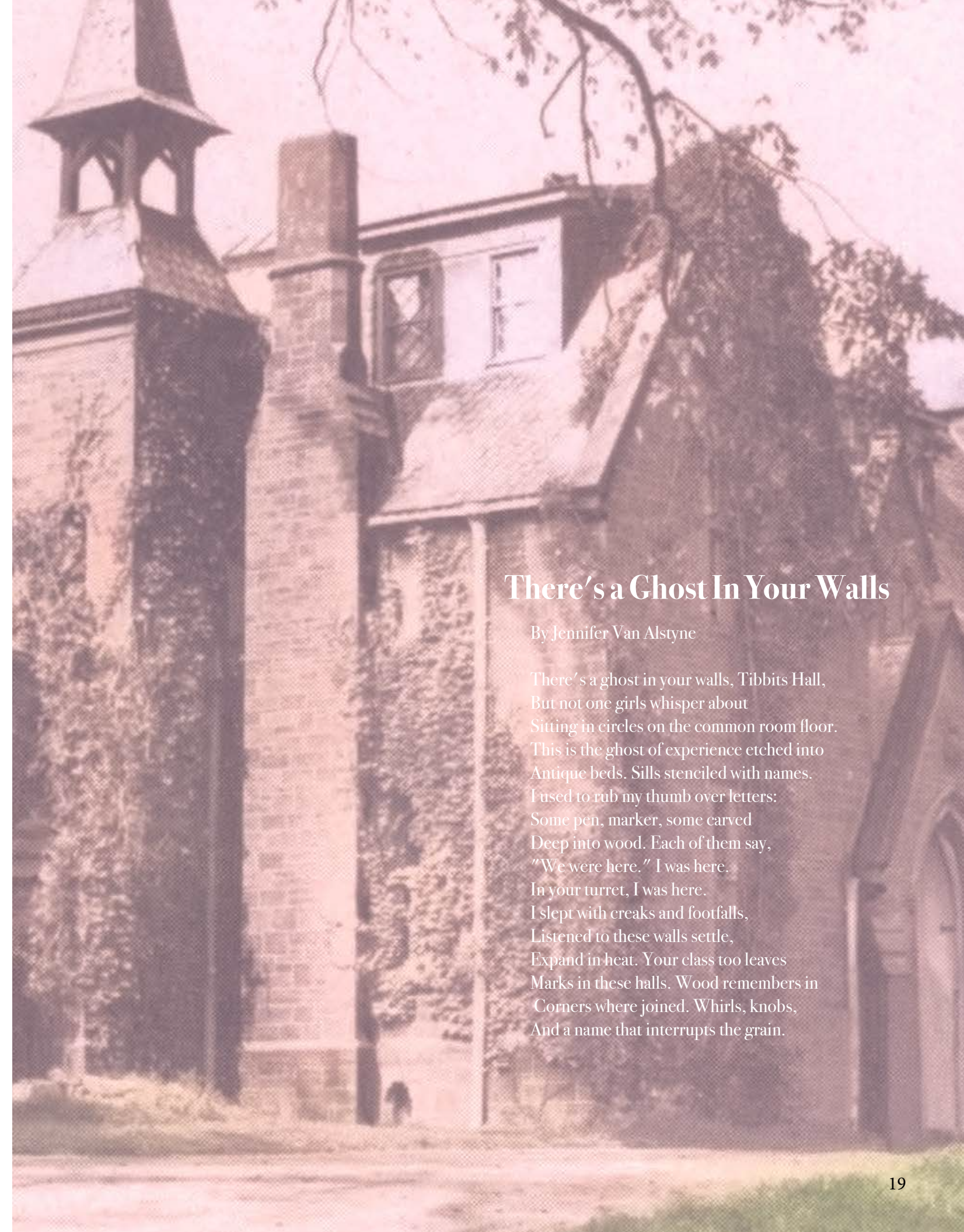
Jennifer with her fiancé, Matthew

Jennifer said, what she sees today with her business, she saw years ago while still a student at Hoosac. “We had been talking with a professor about the old Bubo Society and it prompted us to restart the society. Within a month, we had 20 students meeting at Tibbits Hall with the fire going and we would talk about all of these Hoosac secrets. It felt like such a rewarding community for something that essentially started with a question.”

“And in sharing that kind of community

spirit, I realized that questions of inquiry can create community. I really followed that through the rest of my life in terms of my education and now with the business; it’s nice to see how quickly a community can form.”

Today, Jennifer is part of growing global community. She shared her poem “There’s a Ghost in Your Walls” about her time at Tibbits Hall. To learn more about all that Jennifer is doing, please visit her website [theacademicdesigner.com](http://theacademicdesigner.com). -SG



## There’s a Ghost In Your Walls

By Jennifer Van Alstyne

There’s a ghost in your walls, Tibbits Hall,  
But not one girls whisper about  
Sitting in circles on the common room floor.  
This is the ghost of experience etched into  
Antique beds. Sills stenciled with names.  
I used to rub my thumb over letters:  
Some pen, marker, some carved  
Deep into wood. Each of them say,  
“We were here.” I was here.  
In your turret, I was here.  
I slept with creaks and footfalls,  
Listened to these walls settle,  
Expand in heat. Your class too leaves  
Marks in these halls. Wood remembers in  
Corners where joined. Whirls, knobs,  
And a name that interrupts the grain.



# Derek Rethmeier '92 Finding My Way



After looking at other New England prep schools and Hoosac in NY, Derek Rethmeier '92 said only one school felt like a good fit for him. "Hoosac was this place where I was sure to grow and learn." The experience was new, taking him far from home on the west coast. "I never thought I'd be in those shoes. I had no idea what this experience would be like."

Assigned a dorm in Pitt Mason, Derek quickly adapted to a structured environment. "Hoosac provided an environment where I had to sink or swim academically on my own accord. The days were very structured and I think it taught me how to be practical, learning new ways to work smarter as opposed to harder. I think I also developed ways to be resourceful; always thinking, *Where there's a will, there's a way.*"

Following graduation, Derek stayed out east. "I stuck around Massachusetts after graduation. I wanted to be near my highschool sweetheart. I worked for a local plumber on Martha's Vineyard for the summer, then in the fall of '92 I moved up to Lowell, MA" he said. "I took a couple of college courses to further my education. I missed working, learning a trade, and most of all, earning a living. I enjoyed the feeling of becoming financially independent and finding my way in the world as I chose."

Grateful for the time and sense of independence Derek gleaned from Hoosac, he decided to go back

to work as a plumber and pipe-fitter. "My savings was diminishing fast, so I moved to Steamboat Springs, CO and quickly found employment with a local plumbing contractor. However, I really wanted to make my way back to southern California."

Derek's family owned and operated Western Pump, Inc. and Derek delivered on experience in returning home to work for the family business. "For nearly 17 years, I worked as field labor, a service technician, and as a construction foreman, developing hands-on field skills and knowledge. At the same time, the company was expanding its array of products and services."

"I continued my career development as we grew the business, serving as our General Superintendent. I moved into project engineering, then assisted in estimates for projects, and worked on defining scope of work language for design build proposals. I obtained an additional state contractor's license and the required specialized certifications so that we could compete for work in surrounding states in the commercial and private sectors. I also lead our continued effort to provide Mission Critical Fuel Supply and Distribution System routine maintenance and minor repair (RMMR) operations to several prime contractors supporting multiple U.S. Department of Defense Military bases and operations facilities across the South Pacific Division."



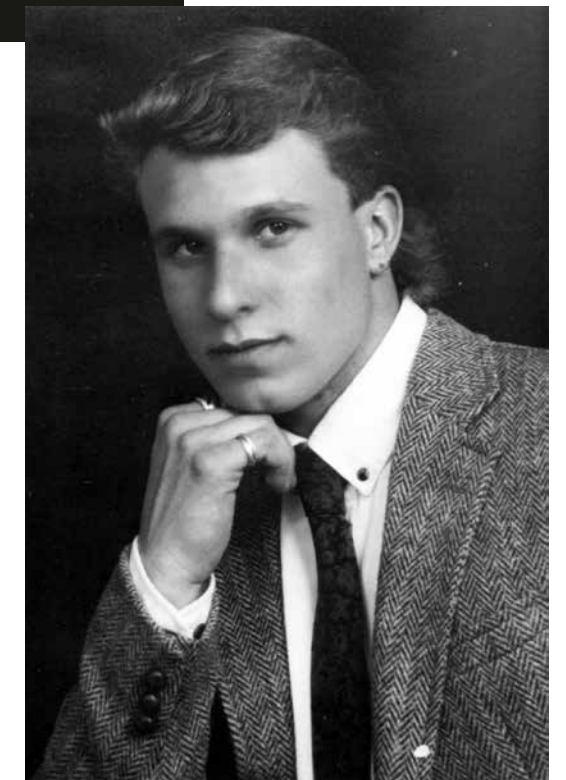
*THE DAYS WERE VERY STRUCTURED AND I THINK IT TAUGHT ME HOW TO BE PRACTICAL, LEARNING NEW WAYS TO WORK SMARTER AS OPPOSED TO HARDER.*

Today, Derek serves as the Director of Federal Divisions as a contract estimator and has more than 28 years of experience behind him.

"Hoosac School played a major role that influenced my development as an individual, my values, my character fabric, and my desire to be successful both in personal and professional life," said Derek. "I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world."

When asked if there was any advice he would give his younger self, he said, "I would say remember the little sign my parents put in the bathroom next to my sink, of the drawing of a little tattered kid in patched up jeans, a torn shirt, a sling-shot in one hand with the other behind his back, and his dog that reads: 'BE PATIENT... God isn't finished with me yet.'"

And as for current students, Derek paraphrased a favorite quote, "Always remember that you are unique – just like everybody else."



*Derek in his 1992 yearbook photo*



Jon Gorman '11 knew he wanted to do something that helped others and, in a strange twist of fate, as the world went on lockdown, all doors opened for the 2011 Hoosac grad.

"The power of gratitude is an immense thing," said Jon, who places a higher value on measuring success using factors other than financial. "I knew my purpose isn't just to make money or serve alcohol at weddings; there's something more fulfilling in knowing that what I'm doing provides a service that betters those around me."

A path toward finding that purpose started during a PG year at Hoosac. Leaving his small beach community in Rhode Island, Jon recalled his first few weeks at the school a totally new and magical experience: "It's like a baby Hogwarts; especially when you're coming through the entry and you're passing the pond and you see all the lanterns lit all the way up to Tibbits."

Jon said the diverse community at Hoosac is one of the most unique aspects of the school. "It's like college, but nothing like college. My roommate was 16 or 17 and I was 18, so I wasn't sure about the dynamic, but it ended up being the perfect symbiotic relationship. He was like a little brother to me. He was shy because of the language barrier, but got better as the year went on. And since I'm more of an extrovert, I tried to include him in everything."

The enforced etiquette at Hoosac provided an early lesson for Jon. "When I was just getting accustomed to the school and wearing a suit jacket every day, it was September and still like 90 degrees. The humidity in New England can be brutal. I remember halfway through the day, I had Mr. Horn for ethics. I remember it was after lunch and we were all dripping sweat and so we started to take our jackets off. Mr. Horn walked in and says, 'Gentleman, I'm going to have to ask you to put your jackets back on.' You could see the look of agitation on everyone's faces, but a few seconds later, Mr. Horn said again, 'Gentlemen, you may take off your jackets.' It was a lesson in politeness; I was shocked, but realized okay, I get the etiquette that applied there and outside of the classroom as well."

"A lot of people ask why I went to a private school and you know, hockey was the initial magnet, but looking back on it, I never had the structure. That's what Hoosac provided." Jon initially found it difficult to dedicate so much time to studying. "I kind of resisted. I thought I'll just wait two hours and then do whatever I want, but after a while I got so bored. Having that structure right before college made it a breeze. I already knew by the time I reached college that you eat and then you need to go hide out in the library, alleviate the distractions, and then it's out of the way. And the sooner you have your work out of the way, the sooner you can relax."

In addition to etiquette and organizational skills, Jon learned to trust himself to deliver as a team member with the school's elite hockey team. "I had just gotten there. Most guys know each other; I'm the new player. Then we're in our first tournament in Pittsburgh and the coach picked me for a shootout and I was like,

## JON GORMAN '11 USED TO SERVE BEER AT EVENTS; POST-PANDEMIC, HE'S NOW SERVING A HIGHER CAUSE



# Serving the Greater Good



## PITT MASON

LEFT TO RIGHT FROM BACK MR. ROSS THOMSON, JON GORMAN, KENNY RAPTIS, HONG GAO, MR. KURLAND, TIANYA WANG, QIQIANG CHEN, ERIC ZHAO, ERIC WU, RYAN URBANI, MATTHEW MARTIN, RYNE GLAZIER, BRYAN LU, ALEXI SARRIGIANNIS, CONOR JORDAN, AUSTIN MCCROSKIE, CHEN ZHENG, POTTER DAI, JASON WU, MATHIEU CARPENTIER, CHARLES COTE, BILLY WU, NEO YANG, JEFFERY XU, MR. KEVIN ROBICHAUD

this is my moment. It was such a great start to getting comfortable and knowing they trust could trust me."

Following Hoosac, Jon suffered an injury. He retrained his focus away from sports and into the physical therapy program at Utica College. "I was just about to start my freshman year. They had a great hockey team and a great physical therapy program. I had gotten into fitness at Hoosac and the seed was there. During my junior year I was very lucky to meet with some very humble, genuine, and honest physical therapists who were part of a week-long career shadowing program. They were blunt and told me about their lifestyle, the paperwork, and described their work-life balance. It was then I concluded maybe I didn't want to do this."

After taking a few general education classes, Jon left college and instead focused on some work experience. "I retreated to Rhode Island and ended up getting a job in Connecticut full time catering and doing event management. It helped me tighten my people skills and sales skills. I did that for years."

One day while bartending, Jon met a man in medical sales. "We kept talking and his work intrigued me. It made me reflect on what I wanted." He said the chance meeting made Jon realize the importance of talking with people in different careers about what they like, don't like, or wish they had done differently. "Conversations and mentorships are great. Even if you have people who might not be in the field you're looking at, but still have life experience, it's still good to talk and listen to what they have to say."

However, Jon warns not to look at the dollar signs attached to a particular career as the only factor. "There are a lot of people who make phenomenal money, but they're just not satisfied. Whether it be spiritually, contentment with their home life, or they work too much; not everything is how it looks on paper. Ask yourself how you measure your success."

Jon credits his girlfriend with supporting him through the career shift. "She's a realtor and a go-getter and she asked, 'Where do you want to go with yourself?' I thought, I love people, but I really want to do something that was satisfying not just financially, but also provides a meaningful service. Yeah, weddings are cool, but I don't feel great about serving everyone beer and watching them get intoxicated. When I left as a junior, I had a lot of science classes under my belt, so I was in a good start to return to school for a health sciences concentration. I applied and was accepted to Rhode Island at the start of 2020."

Jon was attempting to navigate both school and a full time job, at the start of the pandemic. "I was working at Foxwoods Resort Casino and then Covid hit. In terms of my education, it was a blessing. The whole casino shut down and for six months 6,000 people were furloughed, but I had the opportunity to take as many classes as I could. I took accelerated classes and finished a few months ago with my official specialization Bachelor's for Health Science Administration."

While Jon understands the opportunity he found during Covid, he also recognizes the anguish it has caused so many. "I respect and acknowledge and my condolences go out to the people that this has affected so negatively. And now I can take something that was negative for so many and do something that provides a service to better those around me. We all have injuries, but you know, when there's a sense of fulfillment when you're helping somebody or at least you know you're trying your best to help somebody. Whatever you're doing is for the positive ideally." -SG

You can see Jon's winning goal in the Pittsburgh tournament in our fall *Owlet*. Not subscribed? Send an email to [info@hoosac.org](mailto:info@hoosac.org) and never miss the latest alumni or current Hoosac news.



*Father Yost*



*Alumni and Hoosac Trustee Jill Larson '91 brings Leadership and Life Skills to Students*

## Positive Solutions for Hoosac Students

Jill Larson, a 1991 graduate of Hoosac School, returned last year to work with prefects on developing better life skills to positively impact student leadership on campus. Jill said her early years at Hoosac taught her some of the core values she strives to help instill in others today. Jill and her husband Lars, launched the *Positive Solutions for Success Total Wellness Program* inspiring a subsequent book written by Jill, *Positive Solutions for Success*, born out of her passion to help others find balance and in doing so, achieve success.

At the time Jill began her academic career at Hoosac School, she was struggling with upheaval at home and dyslexia. "I was craving structure. I just needed that daily routine, the dependability, the teachers there to help me with homework," she said.

Ever determined, Jill found ways to create her own success, staying up after the distractions of dorm life to study well into the quiet evening or seeking help from teachers.

"I think I always had doubts, like even a word problem in math; I didn't know how to approach it. There are so many subtleties and when you don't have confidence, you doubt yourself all day long about how you're going to approach a homework assignment or a test." She said supportive

faculty made a difference. And the experience taught her the importance of staying organized and more importantly, of asking for help.

"I really believe that that's one of my little superpowers," said Jill. "I think it came from being dyslexic and knowing that I had to ask for help."

This year Jill offered her *Positive Solutions for Success* curriculum to students at Hoosac School. The program included her book and a planner for each student plus video snippets, labeled by topic. After the students complete the program later this term, they will be certified via the Leadership and Life Skills Program. They will also continue to have regular access to Jill for questions, followup, and guidance.

Students will also have opportunities to take or repeat the *Positive Solutions for Success Leadership and Life Skills* coursework annually. "It's going to be different when you revisit a year later, and a year later, and a year later, because we're evolving. No two days alike and we're going to answer these questions differently and it's important to have that repetition," said Jill. Students will receive certification for their participation in the course.

### On inspiration.

Any reflection on inspiration is bound to include the practical wisdom of Thomas Edison who said, "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration." Any idea, however inspired it may be, is of little value until action is taken and hard work is done.

The biblical understanding of inspiration is something literally "God-breathed." The prophets of the Old Covenant, the apostles of the New, the writers of the Gospels—all are understood to have "breathed in" a message from God. In the classical world, inspiration was seen as being somehow inhabited by a god in an ecstasy or even a kind of madness. (Our word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek word for inspiration.) Inspiration, while a divine gift, is always something to be acted upon. The prophet must warn. The apostle must preach. Our enthusiasms need to be channeled.

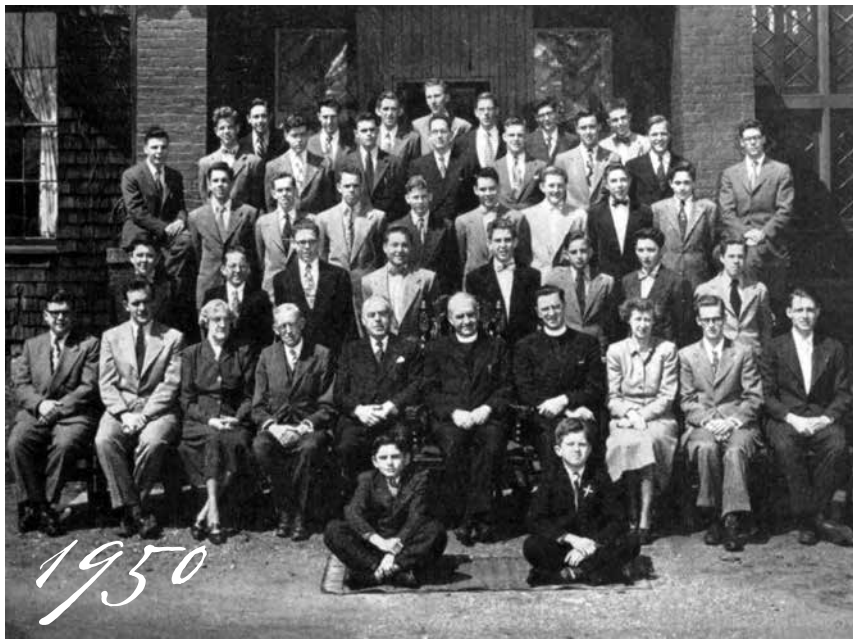
If inspiration ought to lead to action, can action lead to inspiration? Not exactly. But the mind and the will can be formed so as to make the best use of whatever gifts God gives us.

When I addressed the students at the beginning of the year, I touched upon the religious life of the School as an integral part of the formation of the whole person. "A sound mind in a sound body" is ancient wisdom. But there is more to it than just learning about things. A head filled with facts does not necessarily mean wisdom. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, said the Roman poet Juvenal. Before Juvenal, the Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus said the same thing. The word he uses in Greek is nous, which means not just "mind" but "reason"—the basic understanding or awareness that allows human beings to think rationally. In Christian terms, this understanding is a God-given mental capacity to exercise reflective thinking. It is the means of receiving God's thoughts, through faith.

In British English, someone who is alert and has common sense might be said to have a lot of nous. While it is not a word most American English speakers know, I rather hope it becomes part of the vocabulary at Hoosac. I want our students to have a lot of nous!

Spiritual formation as a part of the education of the whole person opens the heart and the mind to the possibility of inspiration and strengthens the will for right action. It enriches the human capacity to recognize what is good and true and beautiful.





# A Hoosac Throwback



# Life re-imagined

Diogo Almeida, a 2020 Hoosac graduate from Brazil, said his first impressions of Hoosac played out like make-believe. “It was just one of those scenarios I was used to seeing in movies. I just didn’t imagine them to be real.”

Hoosac’s woodland hillside campus was a drastic change from the urban coastal city of Natal, Diogo called home. “It was extremely mind-opening. It was truly interesting and it broadened my ideas of culture a lot, by putting me not just in contact with American culture, but also to all other cultures present in the school.”

Hoosac provided an opportunity for Diogo to recognize there is more than one worldview. “The perception that my view is unique and there are many other ways to view a certain situation, and mine is not necessarily the correct one, is something I learned early on at Hoosac.”

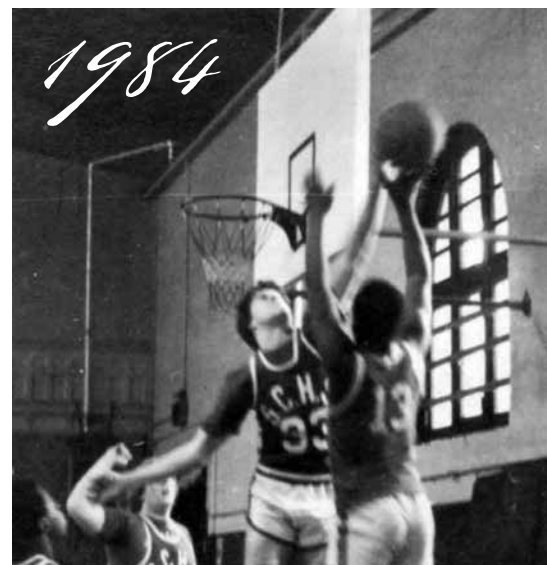
Apart from the diversity of the student population, Diogo found his interests in technology and computers were discovered when the pandemic forced the school to quickly adopt an online platform. “I definitely got used to being on my

computer a whole lot and that helped me start some personal projects and online courses.”

Today, he is enrolled at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) where he is majoring in Computer Science with a double major in economics. “I always loved problem solving and logical thinking I guess.” The school boasts an equally diverse student population, which continues to enrich Diogo on his educational journey.

Of his time at Hoosac, Diogo said he was inspired by his friends and roommates and that his coaches played an important role in his development, but mostly he expressed a keen appreciation for Hoosac’s headmaster, Dean Foster: “I really respect the way Dean Foster acts without worrying about others, he just truly acts like himself (Crocs for shoes are the best).”

He tells current students not to be afraid, “Take every opportunity you can to live to the max.” What was once seemed like a scene in someone else’s story, is now a story all his own.







# the sound of success

Cody Billig's career is anything but ordinary. The 2012 Hoosac graduate is a sound and motion system software specialist tasked with creating realistic audio to accompany flight simulations. "My job is to make a flight simulator feel and sound as close as possible to a real aircraft for pilot training." And he says it's a good fit. "I was always interested in computers and technology, but had never really thought of their intersection with the aerospace industry. This is a happy medium of software and hardware engineering that you don't normally see."

Based today in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, Cody says his success is tied to the leadership skills he developed while at Hoosac. "Hoosac allowed me to grow as a student leader. During my senior year I was a prefect, which was my first introduction to being a leader on campus," he said. "I learned to interact with and lead others. This opportunity gave me the confidence to later lead student groups in university and become a key volunteer for a non-profit organization that I continue to volunteer for today."

In addition to his career working on flight simulation, Cody volunteers with the Quebec branch of FIRST Robotics. "It's a program I find very interesting," he said. "The students work in teams and, even those not interested in engineering, must create a business plan, find sponsors, design uniforms and decorations; it's basically a student-run small business." Cody works as a referee and manages a team of referees and scorekeepers for the events. "I actually started volunteering with this organization during spring break of my senior year at Hoosac."

Cody said he first saw Hoosac School on a gloomy winter day. "It didn't give campus the justice it deserves, but despite the gloomy day, I was still able to meet great students and faculty and see how nice the facilities were."

Learning to be part of a global community had an

enormous impact on Cody: "It was a great learning and life experience. I was able to meet and interact with many students from different cultures and learn about them. Being involved with hockey, bonding with my teammates, with all the travel... It was a memorable experience." He added, "After all that bus travel, I believe I have been on a bus enough for a lifetime. The fond memories of the shenanigans going on while Mr. Burke was driving the bus will stay with me always."

One thing that set Hoosac apart from other schools was the opportunity to lead others. "During my senior year I was a prefect, which was my first introduction to being a leader on campus. I learned to interact with and lead others. This opportunity gave me the confidence to later lead student groups in university and become a key volunteer for a non profit organization that I continue to volunteer for today."

Additionally, Cody said he developed strengths as a public speaker, another skill he calls on today.

"During my senior year, I gave a lot of tours of campus to prospective students and their families," explained Cody. "When I started at Hoosac, I was relatively shy and giving these tours forced me to come out of my shell. Forced me to talk to people I would not normally talk to. With these skills I went on to being a student leader at Norwich University, and later these same skills gave me a solid footing once I joined the corporate world."

Looking back, Cody said the one thing he might have done differently was to relax a little. "Studying is important, but I could have done almost as well, if not just as well, and spent more time with my teammates and friends."

It's a balance our school's founder, Rev. Edward D. Tibbits underscored when he developed Hoosac's mission to develop the whole student, not just academically, but spiritually and socially as well.



*Cody poses with the FIRST Robotics Competition Volunteer of the Year award presented at the Festival de Robotique in Quebec City.*





## The "Best" Sourdough

By Rev. Thomas Best '47

Sometime in the 1960s, I became a friend of a retired Alaskan miner, Joe McGregor, who had relocated to Kalispell, MT. When he arrived, he had a crock of sourdough many years old in his belongings that he had used for making pancakes in Alaska. So popular was this starter, he started a breakfast restaurant in Whitefish featuring his pancakes.

I would go up often to enjoy sourdough pancakes. Whitefish was becoming a resort skiing and summer lake vacation location was also a stop for the Great Northern (GN) streamliner, The Empire Builder, eastbound from Seattle at 6AM and westbound from Chicago at 9PM. So in addition to his restaurant, Joe began supplying the railroad with sourdough batter.

On the eastbound train Joe would deliver a large crock of sourdough pancake batter to the dining car steward for serving breakfast and the dinner crew would give the empty crock back over to the westbound Empire Builder

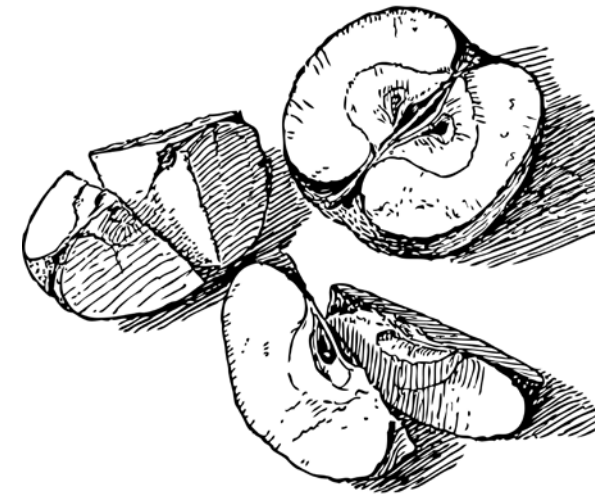
at noon in Havre, MT. There Joe would meet the train to restock the crock for the next morning run.

Anyway, he stopped doing this because of the Health Department or maybe GN terminated it, but our friendship continued and he gave me a small crock with his sourdough starter wherein I was famous for my breakfast of sourdough pancakes and waffles when our kids and grandkids visited. Never wanted to know how he brought the starter to Kalispell... Probably in his dirty laundry sack.

Railroad diner cars were the greatest in food specials. On the Baltimore & Ohio (BO), it was the big salad bowl the waiter brought to the table to fill your plate. The Northern Pacific (NP) was known for their Idaho baked potato. And the Great Northern featured an apple pie and self-serve sharp cheddar cheese. But those lucky morning travelers on that route had the special opportunity enjoying Joe's authentic Alaskan sourdough pancakes.

*Rev. Best is Hoosac's second oldest surviving alum and keeps in regular contact with the school. He attended Hoosac when it was located at Old Campus and regularly traveled by rail.*

## inspiration at its core



Interviewing for this issue ended up being inspiration all its own. I saw how, so often, a simple act of kindness can have such a hugely resounding impact on someone's life. An offer of a place to stay, encouragement of a natural talent emerging, or just the desire to do right by others, can have a lasting impact on those around you.

Some of my earliest inspiration came from my grandfather, an elderly Croatian man who had long worked for the railroad and who spoke in beautiful, broken English. When I was just three or four years old, we were seated on the stoop of the old house in Mackinaw eating apples. We sat in quiet contemplation. He was the kind of man who drew up silence in a room; not for a fear of speaking, but in waiting for the lesson he might share.

As we finished our apples, I looked over in time to see my grandfather pop the core of the apple into his mouth. "Grandpa!" I exclaimed. "You ate the core!"

My grandfather looked over at me, still chewing, his eyes ever gentle and said something that has stayed with me all these years. He said, "Samantra, (his Croatian accent curled the end syllable of my name), may you never know what it means to go hungry."

That simple demonstration of gratitude had such an enormous impact; one that would inform my path for years to come. A simple inspiration born out of a complex history, encoded in the sincerity of his tone, and bearing a lesson I wouldn't fully understand until I was an adult. Even today, we have a saying in our house when the kids are forgetting to show gratitude: "Eat the whole apple."

Ever-present was the question about the meaning behind my grandfather's sentiment. And as I learned of the family's departure from the mountain region far north of Zagreb for the promise of the United States, that inspiration grew. It wasn't just an elder telling a young person to be grateful. The message was carried on a voice which had survived famine and strife; from a man who knew how precarious and fragile something like abundance can be.

That single sentence ushered forth a passion for food and farming, for food security, a love of history and culture, and for story. Since that moment, I have worked as an educator, as a farmer, and as a writer carrying on that message of gratitude, promoting abundance, and hoping to inspire others the way my grandfather's sentiment continues to inspire. -SG



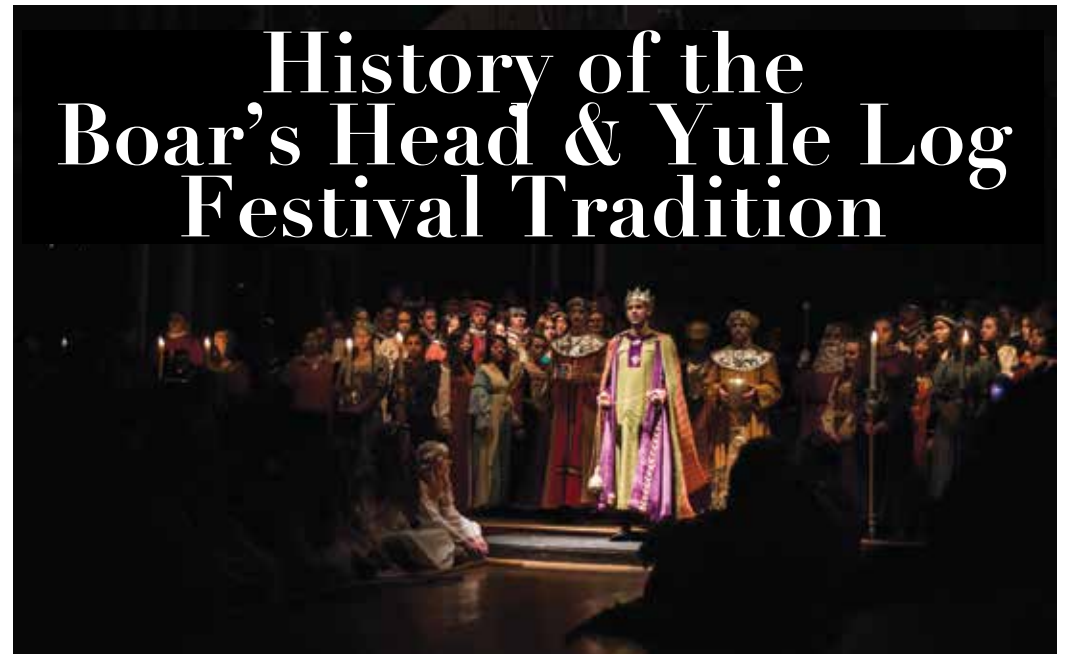
## Old Tower of My School

Again to some sweet haunt of younger day,  
Along a wooded path with lichen moss,  
Beside the brook awhile - a climb across  
The hill, -dear spot I loved along the way;  
Where I could see the valley stretch below  
And lazy stream which silvered in the sun;  
Old Tower of my School; I think the one  
Of all its buildings I had come to know  
And love the best. The silence of my pew  
Where I did kneel and pray, and know such peace  
As only prayer can give, brought good release  
From self and things of self. The quiet of you  
Still brings its strength and peace, though I have moved  
In lands far from the valley I have loved.

Lieutenant Richard Bryan Leake, USA (1908-1912)



Richard Leake went on to graduate from Williams College and soon after served in the first world war as a lieutenant in the Field Artillery. When he passed away in 1959, Father Whitcomb officiated. Mr. Leake submitted the above poem to Hoosac School while serving during the war effort. It appears in the 1919 Mid-Year Owl. See more on Richard and the Leake family on Page 15 of this issue.



THE CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL IN CINCINNATI, OHIO OFFERS AN ACCOUNT OF THE TRADITION OF THE BOAR'S HEAD & YULE LOG PAGEANT WITH MENTION OF HOOSAC'S OWN FRANK BUTCHER



The above letter was sent to Hoosac School from Trustee William Marvin, who purchased it at auction. The letter is addressed to George Mortimer Tibbits (the first) at his home in Hoosick, New York. You can read about George in this issue's history feature on Page 12.



The Boar's Head is probably the oldest continuing festival of the Christmas season. On its 600th anniversary in 1940, it was first celebrated at Christ Church, Cincinnati.

This pageant is rooted in ancient times when the boar was sovereign of the forest. A ferocious beast and menace to humans it was hunted as a public enemy. At Roman feasts, boar was the first dish served. Like our Thanksgiving turkey, roasted boar was a staple of medieval banquets. As Christian beliefs overtook pagan customs in Europe, the presentation of a boar's head at Christmas came to symbolize the triumph of the Christ Child over sin.

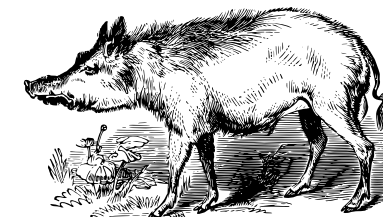
The Festival we know today originated at Queen's College, Oxford, England in 1340. Legend has it that a scholar was studying a book of Aristotle while walking through the forest on his way to Christmas Mass. Suddenly, he was confronted by an angry wild boar. Having no other weapon, the resourceful Oxonian rammed his metal-bound philosophy book down the throat of the charging animal, whereupon the brute choked to death. That night the boar's head, finely dressed and garnished, was borne in procession to the dining room, accompanied by

carolers singing "in honor of the King of bliss."

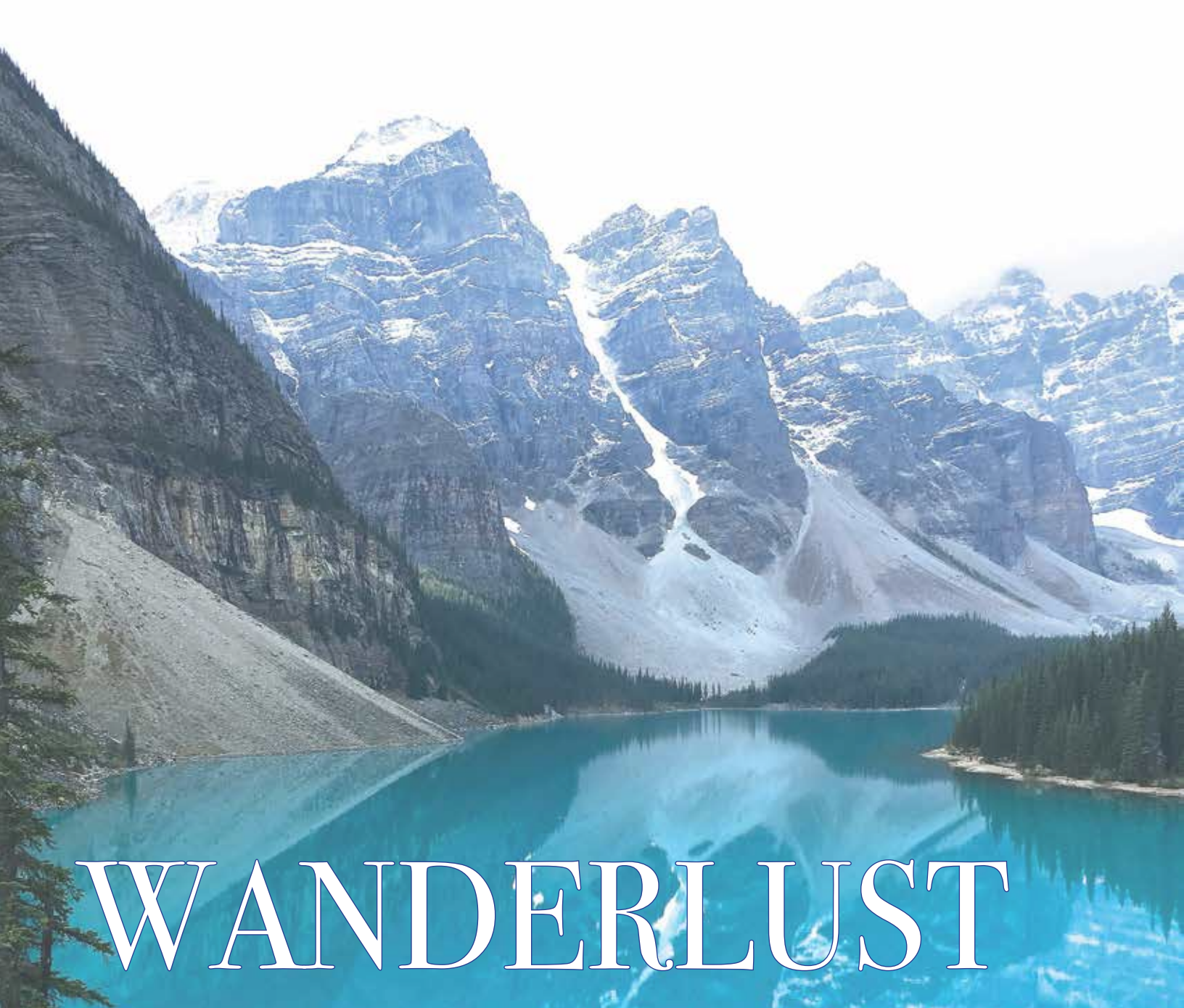
By 1607, an expansive ceremony was in use at St. John's College, Cambridge, England. There, the boar's head was accompanied by "mustard for the eating" and decorated with flags and sprigs of evergreen, bay rosemary and holly. It was carried in state to the strains of the Boar's Head carol, still sung in the Christ Church ceremony.

By then the traditional Boar's Head Festival had grown to include lords, ladies, knights, historical characters, cooks, hunters, and pages.

This was the ceremony brought to colonial America by the Bouton family, persecuted French Huguenots who had learned of the custom during a period of exile in England. The Boutons settled in Troy, New York, and were closely connected with the Episcopal church and its schools, including Hoosac School where their descendant became Rector in 1888. He established the festival which had meant so much to his family as an annual Christmas observance. In 1926, the New York Evening Post described the Boar's Head as a "complex and rich tapestry" of "exquisite melodies."







# WANDERLUST

**AMANDA FLEMING '06 SAID HOOSAC TAUGHT HER TO APPRECIATE CULTURES DIFFERENT FROM HER OWN. TODAY, SHE TRAVELS THE WORLD FOR WORK AND FOR THE EXPERIENCES EACH JOURNEY BRINGS**



While at Hoosac, Amanda Fleming '06 met students from all over the world. The experience had a lasting impact: “It inspired me to travel,” she said. “The friendships I developed with international students on campus expanded my mind and increased my awareness of the experiences of other cultures.”

“I find it amazing to get to know new people, see how other cultures operate and see the places that shaped history. While living and working in London was eye-opening and allowed me to immerse myself in the city, it was really my yoga/surf trip to Costa Rica that changed me profoundly. I booked my first solo trip to Costa Rica because I wanted somewhere that was close to the US (ruled out Bali) and was set in a group environment. I got to improve my surfing skills and meet new people from around the world. We were also practicing yoga twice a day in the middle of a beautiful jungle. It was deeply spiritual and incredibly healing.”

While not traveling, Amanda today is busy working at an NYC-based marketing agency, in the sports and entertainment industry. “My career has allowed me to travel to places I would have never visited otherwise. It took me to Los Angeles for four years. I was able to build an ambassador program for Sony’s photographers, I traveled to Germany with Leica Camera for their headquarter opening, launched a new Google product on Abbot Kenny in LA, was an AP at Kanye’s listening party in Wyoming, and most recently planned a week long FAM trip for the Grammy Awards. I’m very grateful for the countless opportunities I have been given throughout my career and look forward to an exciting year ahead.”

Amanda credits her personal and professional relationships with helping her through the pandemic. “As an events/PR professional, a lot of money was lost when Covid first hit. I worked for a small boutique agency that laid off 95 percent of their workforce. I was lucky not to be a part of that group and my main client, Mastercard, was able to take me with them to a new agency, but it was a rough year for the industry.” She suggests



Left Amanda waves from a lookout in Alberta, Canada. Above When Amanda isn't working, she's exploring new places and new experiences

students today always have a backup plan. “Always be thinking about the bigger picture. It was my strong support network that kept me on my feet during this tough year.”

Reflecting on her time at Hoosac, Amanda said it was a unique experience coming into a school with, at the time, a predominantly male student population. “It was a unique situation and while I enjoyed my friendships with men, Also felt the skewed ratio tended to have advantages not afforded to women in academics and sports.” She said she was thrilled to hear about the new girls dorm. “I think it’s a wonderful improvement and will allow more women to take up space and contribute to greater diversity on campus, which can only benefit everyone.”

Amanda’s favorite memories of Hoosac were during the winter season: “Campus was beautiful; the buildings and rolling hills and trees. Christmas is especially magical at Hoosac.”





## Thomas Wright '70



Hoosac Trustee Thomas Weir Wright, 69 of Ancram, NY and New York City passed away unexpectedly on May 4th. He was born on December 13th, 1951 in Washington DC and graduated from Hoosac School in 1970. He studied Theosophic Philosophy at Boston

University for one year after which he traveled to Afghanistan, Greece, Israel, Turkey, and France, amongst many other destinations known only to himself. After the death of his mother in late 1973, he settled on the Eastern Shore of Maryland on the family farm.

Tom was involved in theatre and film in New York City and studied acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute, later lending these skills in several productions of the Boar's Head and Yule Log event at his Alma Mater.

Tom met his future wife, Annette in 1992, and relocated to the small, quiet town of Ancram, NY, on a hilltop overlooking the Catskills and the Berkshires. The family grew with his son Tygre Wright DeMaria in 1994, followed by twin daughters, Pearl and Stella, in 2004.

Tom, a generous, loyal, curious, and caring soul, always extended a hand to those in need. Tom was a great tipper. He was an iconic figure in Tribeca, often seen walking his dogs on the streets. He saw the Towers go up and he saw them come down. He loved and was beloved by his wife, his children, his siblings, nephews and nieces. A memorial service was held July 10th in Ancramdale, NY.

## Norman Bohn '60

Norman Warriner Bohn, 80, of Charlotte, VT passed away peacefully at home on June 29, 2021, following a long illness. Norman, son of the late Harold and Mary Bohn, was born on February 10, 1941, in East Orange, NJ. He grew up in Montclair, NJ and graduated from Hoosac School in 1960. Norman attended the University of Vermont (UVM), where he met his beloved, late wife Roxie. They married in 1965. Norman also formed

life-long friendships through the University and Sigma Nu Fraternity. He graduated from UVM in 1964 and taught for four years at Fryeburg Academy in Maine before completing a master's degree in non-western history from Montclair State University in 1970. He returned to Vermont, where he taught history at South Burlington High School for 29 years.

Norman was an avid lover of jokes and one-liners, current events, and history (with a special interest in World Wars I and II). His life travels took him cross-country as a newlywed, to Florida and Costa Rica for vacations, and abroad to Europe many times. As much as Norman enjoyed traveling, he was happiest at home in Vermont – spending summers

# In Memory



on Lake Champlain with family and friends, cutting wood, and tending his garden and yard.

He is survived by his two children (Christopher and Jessica Bohn); sister (Emily-Ellen Mudryk); three grandchildren (Garrett, Nathan, and Halle Bohn); and two nieces and their families (Jennifer and Matt Culhane; Ellen and Al Turnbull).

A Celebration of Life took place on September 18th.





## 'WHY I GIVE' DONOR PROFILE



My motivation to include Hoosac in my charitable giving is simple. First, I had a very positive experience at Hoosac that helped me move from being a failing student (at my previous school) to succeeding and actually enjoying high school. The faculty/student ratio played a huge part in this. If a student at Hoosac needs support, this is noticed and addressed. Second, I realize that the tuition is not enough to sustain the school. Hoosac is a unique school and has been a perfect fit for thousands of students and will continue, with our help, to be the right place for students for many years to come.

Why do alumni hesitate to give? I think that many alumni don't realize that Hoosac School

relies on giving. It may be that alumni who participate in charitable giving at all, focus on what is perceived as "needy" and see Hoosac as elite. In fact, successful Hoosac graduates have contributed to our world in many ways for many decades.

Hoosac's future? I think Hoosac needs to stay on top of the challenges the country and world are facing right now, to stay relevant. Hoosac's board and administration must anticipate what might be coming down the road. The school has weathered quite a lot over the years and managed to thrive (with a few dips). Four of the 6 schools I interviewed at have closed. So, clearly, alumni support is paramount!



*You are Hoosac.*

# Make Hoosac part of *Your* Legacy

Hoosac graduates know what it means to *Be Hoosac*. It isn't something taught in a textbook; it's something that comes from shared experience. In short, *Be Hoosac* means something a little different for each of us. It's inspiring others, rising above doubt, it's nurturing volunteerism in yourself and others, it's finding yourself and helping others do the same.

The *Be Hoosac* we share in common is that part we carry forward in the spirit of optimism and generosity.

Your legacy is a gift to future generations. Protect the long-standing traditions and culture of Hoosac and make Hoosac School a partial beneficiary to your assets, estate, will, or life insurance so that your Hoosac story will be forever part of *your* legacy.

For more information on how to benefit Hoosac with a legacy gift, please contact Headmaster Dean Foster at (518) 686-7331 or email [headmaster@hoosac.org](mailto:headmaster@hoosac.org).

*Be Hoosac* in all you do.



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