LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Earlier this year, I shared in an issue of the Wildcatter that what I love most about Marin Academy’s Mission Statement is that it is an inspiration for us all and not simply directed by the adults of the community toward the students. In this way, the statement’s three key directives, to “think, question, and create,” become pathways for us all. Reflecting on these ideals and looking ahead to what promises to be a dynamic 35th Anniversary for MA, I am delighted to share that the school is living its mission with fervency and strong purpose.

There are many wonderful moments in the life of this school, some of which you will read about in this spring issue of Nexus. In October, the school hosted its 2nd Annual Conference on Democracy, a two-day event featuring a wide array of perspectives on political, social, economic, and environmental issues that our communities face locally, nationally, and globally. Since its inception, the overarching goal of the conference has been to provide a comprehensive view of the democratic concept and to examine the question: “What does it mean to prepare students for life in a democratic society?” This year’s theme of “learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology, and equity of all communities” was inspired, in part, by the work of the National Association of Independent Schools and the United Nations in its Decade of Education for Sustainability. I’m pleased to share that in 2006, MA was honored by NAIS as a Leading Edge School in the category of Equity and Justice for this year’s Conference on Democracy. Bravo!

Other highlights of the fall and winter included an assembly with legendary producer Norman Lear and an opportunity to view an original copy of the Declaration of Independence. In February, our week-long Literary Festival celebrated its fourteenth year. The festival’s longstanding commitment to having students, faculty, and visiting authors working alongside of one another remains an important and distinctive element of the program.

There will be more news in the months ahead as we prepare to celebrate thirty-five years in the life of Marin Academy. For now, I invite you to join me in saluting the remarkable vitality of this school community!

Warm regards,

BODIE BRIZENDINE

Head of School
Marin Academy inaugurated the Conference on Democracy in 2004 in an effort to strengthen the connection between our mission and the everyday intellectual life of the school. The overarching goal of the conference is to provide a comprehensive view of the democratic concept and to examine the question: “What does it mean to prepare students for life in a democratic society?” The 2005 Conference on Democracy sought to explore the themes of justice, equity, and sustainability, and in February was selected by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) as a Leading Edge School Program. Where would you go to hear physicist and Nobel Prize nominee Dr. Helen Caldicott speak about health risks that come from little publicized sources of nuclear radiation, such as spent artillery shells strewn across the landscape of Iraq? Or to talk to a New Orleans high school principal about the ordeals his students and neighbors endured during the flooding of their city after Hurricane Katrina? How about if you wanted to debate issues of fairness in the media with one of the country’s leading journalists? You might think you would need to go to Capitol Hill to engage with experts on such a wide array of topics, but during the Conference on Democracy in October 2005, you could find it all on the campus of Marin Academy. Established in 2004, the Conference on Democracy in February was selected by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) as a Leading Edge School Program.

The idea for the Conference on Democracy was born when MA teachers Mark Stefanski and Bill Meyer, who would later go on to become two of the co-chairs for the conference, were talking in the MA lunch line one afternoon in the months leading up to the 2004 presidential election. The conference began with the modest goal of finding a way to look at the issues of the day in the context of what the diverse voices of American history are heard.

The 2005 Conference on Democracy was born when MA teachers Mark Stefanski and Bill Meyer, who would later go on to become two of the co-chairs for the conference, were talking in the MA lunch line one afternoon in the months leading up to the 2004 presidential election. The conference began with the modest goal of finding a way to look at the issues of the day in the context of what the diverse voices of American history are heard.

If you missed last year’s Conference on Democracy, you can download podcasts of several of the panels at http://courses.ma.org/conference_democracy_podcasts_05.html.

SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON DEMOCRACY

DISTINGUISHED GUEST SPEAKERS

Joshua Abraham Director, Reclaim the Future Project at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights

Joan Blades Co-founder of MoveOn.org and author of The Motherhood Manifesto

Dr. Helen Caldicott Nobel Prize nominated physician, activist, and co-founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility. Her most recent book is The New Nuclear Danger

Severn Cullis-Suzuki Co-founder of the Skytll Project and member of the United Nations World Summit Advisory Panel

David Culp Economist and president of Solano Partners, a conservation finance consulting firm

Rod Gould Son Raja City Manager

James Gray High school principal from the City of New Orleans

Quentin Hardy Slcim Valley Bureau Chief, Forbes Magazine

Robert Mass Former U.S. Poet Laureate; professor of English at the University of California-Berkeley

Charles McGlashan Alm County Supervisor

Lawrie Mott Former senior scientist, Natural Resources Defense Council

Joe Nation California State Assembly Member and candidate for U.S. Congress

Maxwell Pike ’05 ACRONC relief volunteer in Houston, Texas


Norman Solomon Nationally syndicated columnist and radio commentator. Founder and executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. Author of War Made Easy

Dr. Ronald Takaki Former senior scientist, California Poet Laureate

Al Young California Poet Laureate

On behalf of Marin Academy, we extend special thanks to the parents, alumni, parents, students, faculty, and friends of the school who generously donated their time to serve as presenters and speakers at the conference.

Annie Hendrix, Bill Meyer, and Mark Stefanski, Co-Chairs, Conference on Democracy

1 Marley Lovell ’04 confers with New Orleans high school principal James Gray after the panel discussion on “Lessons from Katrina: Rebuilding a Democratic Society.” 2 Dr. Helen Caldicott salutes the crowd after her presentation on “The Global Implications of the Nuclear Age.” 3 Joshua Abraham, director of the Reclaim the Future Project at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (foreground), during the panel discussion “Dimensions of Sustainability: The Intersection of Ecology, Social Justice, and the Economy.” 4 Former U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Hass, who is currently a professor of English at University of California-Berkeley, and Jim Baldwin, chair of the MA English Department. 5 Dr. Helen Caldicott, co-founder of Physicians for Social Responsibility, signs a copy of her book The New Nuclear Danger for MA’s Kirk Pergo ’88. 6 Ronald Takaki, professor of ethnic studies emeritus at University of California-Berkeley, speaks with Head of School Bobo Brindaboina after Takaki’s keynote speech “A Democratic Voice of Curriculm for the 21st Century.” 7 Jill Soloway, co-founder of MoveOn.org, with MA students after her lecture presentation.
In October 2005, Marin Academy hosted the MA Valley Film Festival’s screening of “Soul of Justice: Thelton Henderson’s American Journey.” Henderson, who is senior judge on the Federal District Court of Northern California, has had a career that parallels the larger historic arc of the Civil Rights movement and the changing view of government in America. He has spent much of his life as the first or only African-American in his field, including as the first African-American attorney in the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division in the early 1960s. In 1980, he became only the second African-American ever appointed to the Federal District bench in Northern California.

MA extends special thanks to Mark Felix, director of the California Film Institute and parent of Lindsey ’07, for making this screening possible.

In January 2006, Marin Academy welcomed legendary producer, activist, and philanthropist Norman Lear to campus as part of MA’s Democracy Speaker Series. In addition to talking about his career in advocacy and entertainment, Lear also brought one of the twenty-five surviving original prints of the Declaration of Independence to MA as part of the “Declare Yourself!” young voter activism project.

Known as the creator of Archie Bunker and “All in the Family,” Lear produced several other television shows, including “The Jeffersons” and “Maude.” He received the National Medal of Arts from President Clinton in 1999 and was among the first seven television pioneers inducted into the Television Academy Hall of Fame.

In 1980, Lear founded the nonprofit organization People for the American Way, which has been one of the country’s leading advocates of civic participation and democratic values over the last quarter-century. In describing the People for the American Way’s mission, Lear said, “When we see anxiety and alienation manipulated for political gain, and people of all ages losing enthusiasm for democracy, we are moved to do whatever we can to make sure that our children and grandchildren grow and live in a society shaped by the American promise.”

Norman and his wife Lyn bought one of twenty-five surviving original prints of the Declaration of Independence in 2000. During the presidential election of 2004, the document toured the country as the centerpiece of the Declaration of Independence Road Trip, and Lear brought it to Marin Academy to allow students, teachers, and parents to view this significant piece of the American legacy.

We wish to extend a special thank you to Kevin Canell ’08 and his family for their role in bringing Norman Lear to our school.

**SOUL OF JUSTICE: THELTON HENDERSON’S AMERICAN JOURNEY**

Shelley Miller graduated from Marin Academy in 1986 and went on to Whitman College in Washington state. She later earned a master’s degree in nursing and post-master’s certification in anesthesia. A nurse since 1995, she has been a nurse anesthetist since 2004. Shelley currently works at San Francisco General Hospital.

In the San Marcos province of Guatemala, there is a medical center called Hospital de la Familia in the small volcanic highland town of Nuevo Progreso. Inspired and built in 1976 by a Guatemalan priest and a California builder, the hospital serves between 6,000 and 14,000 people annually. Hospital de la Familia has become the largest employer in a region where the unemployment rate is 50 percent. Its success has brought much-needed improvements to the town, including more funding for schools, a clean water supply, and road improvements. The once eight to twenty-four hour drive from Guatemala City is now consistently six hours. Although the hospital employs a year-round Guatemalan doctor, different volunteer surgical teams (made up of thirty to forty surgeons, nurses, nurse anesthetists, translators, teachers, and social workers) travel to the hospital three to four times a year to perform specialized surgeries. For two weeks in both 2004 and 2006, Shelley anesthetized over sixty patients during the past trip in February, and each one has left an impression in her heart. From the malnourished babies and children with facial and extremity deformities to adults with hernias, chronic hearing loss, and cataracts, corrective surgery has improved all of their lives. What touches Shelley most, however, is observing the pride that comes with the availability of good medical care. The hospital has trained Guatemalan nurses through its own program, and also funds a year-round dentist and nutrition center.

For Shelley, the opportunities that she has been given to pursue an education have been instrumental to her. Her feeling of social responsibility and the sense of reward that she receives from her time at Hospital de la Familia have kept her coming back.
Leah Morfin '98

Some of Leah Morfin’s earliest experience in public policy came when she was selected to represent Marin Academy at a youth peace conference funded by the Ford Foundation in Russia during her senior year in 1998. This event brought together students from over thirty countries, including areas riven by conflict during the mid-1990s, such as Israel-Palestine and Yugoslavia, as well as places with a recent history of violence, such as South Africa and Northern Ireland. Leah described this conference, which included discussions about the potential of youth activism with her peers from some of the world’s most unstable regions, as one of the “central shaping experiences” of her life.

Not long after she arrived in Los Angeles to do her undergraduate studies in political science and African-American studies at UCLA, Leah took the initiative to get involved with a variety of campus organizations. As a founding member of Bruins Advocating Rape Education, she and other students went to fraternities and sororities to conduct educational seminars about the problem of sexual assault and violence against women. She also spent an academic quarter in Russia during her senior year in 1998. This event was incredibly powerful as it was something that many of these women had not done or perhaps even considered doing before.

Her job at the Ms. Foundation has also allowed Leah to continue her efforts to prevent violence against women. A major part of the organization’s Safety Program, Leah explained, is “supporting community-based responses to hold batterers accountable and to prevent violence before it starts. This is especially important among communities of color and in poor communities where there has been immense discrimination from the criminal legal system and law enforcement.”

One of Leah’s first jobs after graduating from UCLA in 2002 was as a news assistant at the New York Times. During her tenure at the Times, she came across an article in the newspaper about the Ms. Foundation for Women, a New York-based organization that supports the efforts of women and girls to “govern and influence their own lives.” The article inspired Leah to apply for a job with the foundation, and the work she now does as a program associate at the Health and Safety Division.

Leah says she’s “learned a ton” in her two years at the Ms. Foundation. One of her main responsibilities has been helping to administer the foundation’s Women and AIDS Fund, which is the first (and to date only) national fund that gives money to organizations led by and for HIV-positive women. “Over the years, we have helped to build a network of these organizations that gathered together in Washington D.C. in May 2005 to lobby their congressional representatives about HIV/AIDS issues. This event was incredibly powerful as it was something that many of these women had not done or perhaps even considered doing before.”

Taj Wilson '00

Taj’s memories of Marin Academy are of a welcoming environment that “set a tone of encouraging students’ interests, including issues related to questions of sexual rights, either through work in law, public policy, or community organizing. “I am interested in looking at legal and policy efforts at breaking the binary of gender identity and sexuality.”

During his time at the ACLU, much of Taj’s work came in a case involving medicinal marijuana. While eleven states (including California) have passed laws allowing physicians to prescribe marijuana for medical reasons, the federal government has in many instances interfered with state’s implementation of these laws. When the attorney general of Hawaii threatened to prosecute doctors who prescribed marijuana for their critically ill patients, Taj and his team at the ACLU wrote an injunctive complaint and threatened to file it, which led to the attorney general publicly retracting his threat. In its 2005 decision on a case from California, the Supreme Court affirmed the federal government’s right to enforce federal marijuana laws, but also permitted states to pass and implement their own medical marijuana statutes.

Taj has continued his public service while at Harvard. He currently works at the Hale and Dore Legal Services Center, where the university’s law students help meet the legal needs of people in the diverse Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. Taj has found Harvard to be very different from the “competitive and uptight place that is depicted in popular culture” and enjoys his work with the school’s Black Law Students Association and the Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review. Before returning to the Bay Area in July to work at the public defender’s office, he will spend the first half of his summer researching cases on topics ranging from peer-to-peer online sharing to gay rights while working at the Washington D.C. office of Jenner and Block, one of the nation’s top law firms and a recipient of the American Bar Association’s Pro Bono Award.

Taj’s concerns about the “war on drugs” policy model prompted him to spend last summer working at the American Civil Liberties Union’s Drug Law Reform Project in Santa Cruz. This division of the ACLU has been involved in a number of controversial cases in recent years: challenging racial profiling in drug sweeps occurring in Texas, stopping police harassment of needle exchange programs in Massachusetts, and calling for an end to a 1998 federal law that denies college financial aid to students with previous drug convictions.
Mulan Academy held its Fourteenth Annual Literary Festival in January and February of 2006. Leading novelists, poets, songwriters, and essayists talked about the craft of writing with the MA community and held workshops for student writers. Some of MA’s writers—including David Bany’s ’06, Lark Kim ’06, Gustavo López ’06, Head of School Bodie Brindamour, and MA English teachers and Literary Co-chairs Jim Baldwin and Joe Coulton—also presented their work throughout the weeklong event.

The keynote speakers for the 2006 Literary Festival were Jane Hirshfield and Martin Espada. Hirshfield is the author of six collections of poetry, including After (1996), won an American Book Award. His poems have in The New Yorker, The Atlantic, and four of the past six volumes of The Best American Poetry. In 2004, Hirshfield was awarded the 70th Academy Fellowship for distinguished poetic achievement by the Academy of American Poets, an honor formally held by Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Elizabeth Bishop.

Espada has written seven award-winning books of poetry that draw on his Puerto Rican heritage and his work experiences, where he teaches creative writing, Latino poetry, and the work of Pablo Neruda. His poems have appeared in Bread Loaf, Harper’s, Harper’s, The Atlantic, and The Best American Poetry. He is a professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where he teaches creative writing, Latino poetry, and the work of Pablo Neruda.

Preparations are already underway for MA’s Fifteenth Annual Literary Festival, which will be held in February 2007. Contact Jim Baldwin or sbaldwin@ma.org for more information.

On Writing at MA

BY DAVID BANY’S ’06

Of all the unique endeavors that Martin Academy fosters, the Literary Festival is perhaps the single event that most reveals the secret undertones of student life on campus. While Rock Band, Mimecourse, Vision Quest, Senior Speeches, Outings, Senior Projects, and the Conference on Democracy—in all of their hallowed traditions—form a foundation based on the school’s cultural heritage, Lit Fest remains at the core of every facet of life at MA, as an emblem of the lucidity of thought we all pursue through writing during our time here.

There is no doubt that Martin Academy teaches the canon. We read great literature in some modest effort to understand something of our own lives and our interactions with other people and this planet. Analyzing literature, then, becomes a candid introspection of our personal interpretations that develop during our residence here. Thinking critically sometimes compels us to ‘tie the poem to a chair with rope’ and torture a confession out of it” as Billy Collins writes, and it would be difficult to doubt the importance of studying literature. Since ancient times, people have scribbled their words onto the page, eternally placing fragments of their lives and their understanding of what it is to be alive on record. Literature is, by some means, an affirmation that our stories are not lost in transience, and we have no better way of accessing the multitudes of consciousness through time. So it makes sense to celebrate it.

In my time at MA, I have seen many great minds come to the school and share their stories. As a freshman—fourteen years old, scruffy and mop-hair—I marveled at Martin Espada and Li-Young Lee read their work. I watched them as they unfurled their pensive webs of verse and let them linger in the air, and later, I was compelled to bask in the transitory conceptions of thought, absorbing their words and shifting positions in my seat, like one small part of an ebbing tide in the audience. Lit Fest has always seemed a time to perpetuate our faith in the way of accessing the multitudes of consciousness through time. As I leave Martin Academy, I am beginning to fully appreciate the fervency my teachers have brought to the classroom, day after day, year after year. The opportunities are here, if you decide to take them. This is a place where you can go to lunch with teachers to continue a dialogue on the craft of writing, or listen to their thoughts about their novels-in-progress, or talk about the implications of reading the classics in high school, and later in the week, compete in a poetry slam or read at an open mic. I am beginning to understand that part of my commitment to living in a democratic society is to raise consciousness by voicing the world I inhabit.

When Naomi Shihab Nye came during Lit Fest in 2005, I stayed after her reading to talk to her. She was very kind and thoughtful, especially for a well-known, published poet. She rattled a bit about her childhood—growing up in Jerusalem as well as San Antonio, and her own amalgamation of Arab and American cultures that pervades so much of her work—and laughed after telling a short story. It wasn’t her writing that I remember most though; it was her humanness. She showed me that writers are very real people, that they are not effigies of some ornate muse, but rather flesh and bones, ashes and dust, just like everybody else. She helped incite a revolution of thought inside my mind that had been brewing since freshman year, a state of mind that I think my English teachers have long known, and that Lit Fest seeks to encapsulate: The world is made for writers—and for all artists—because human expression is all we have.

David Bany’s ’06 will be a freshman at Middlebury College in the fall.
On January 6, more than seventy alumni from the classes of 2001 through 2005 and MA faculty packed Foster Hall to visit and catch up with one another.

The Class of 2000 met at Club Deluxe in San Francisco on December 22, 2005 for its five-year reunion. About forty class members celebrated at the bar and enjoyed a live jazz band. Although many of us had not seen each other since graduation, there was still a feeling of community—we were surprised at how easy it was to come together as a class again! –ADRIANA BAER ’00

The Class of 1995 gathered at Stafford Lake in Novato for our ten-year reunion. While classmates mingled and munched on finger foods, it was at first oddly familiar to see everyone in the same place, and yet we were all reminded of how much mileage we had gained as the stories of adventures and accomplishments emerged. It was a joy to learn about each other—only to be interrupted by another arriving classmate looking familiar, but matured. Within the group present were a professional photographer, a teacher, a road bike racer, a gardener, and many continuing students among others. See you all at our fifteenth reunion in the summer of 2010! –MICHAEL WHEELER ’95

On Friday, March 23, 2007, Marin Academy’s Alumni Leadership Team has been reestablished. The team works on planning alumni events and reunions, staying in touch through the class secretaries, bringing alumni speakers to campus, and working with young alumni and MA students.

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The Class of 1975 reunion picnic was held outside the MA Gym on Saturday, October 8, 2005, with more than half the Class of ’75 and alumni from the classes of ’74–’77 coming from all over the U.S. to attend. Many faculty and family members were able to attend as well, including Bill and Betsey McCluskey, Jim and Gladys Thacher, Don and Donna Alexander, Phil Davis, Marianne LePage (Whiting), Charles Little, Barney and Barb Stout, Danuta Tempel, Jack Thompson, and Bev Williams, with many others sending their deepest regrets. We reminisced over old yearbooks, old photos, and (yes) old faces! –LUCIA JUVENTON

THIRTY-YEAR REUNION

Things definitely change after twenty years, but after several hours of our rehashing the “old” days, it appeared that things have stayed pretty much the same as our class never had a problem showing up for the party. Not only was the turnout of students very impressive, but we were surprised by several teachers that elected to join in the festivities. A huge thank you goes out to Kathy Faraday who adorned the hall with photos, yearbooks, and memories of 1985, and thanks also to Jefferson Coombs who somehow managed to get the word out across the globe to all our classmates. Today, we run the gamut of careers from musicians to movie moguls and lawyers to environmentalists. No doubt we have all taken different paths, but it still felt as though all those school assemblies, lunchroom antics, and MA activities were only yesterday. –JIM HYMAN ’85

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1997 Hilary Lang Greenbaum writes, “I just received word that I was accepted to the PhD program at the University of Colorado at Denver. I will be studying development and sustainability of agricultural landscapes,”

1979 Lynne Moss Murphy reports, “I am currently living in San Carlos, working for Morgan Stanley. My husband, Gary and I will be celebrating our twenty-fourth wedding anniversary on May 26th this year. My daughter, Alexandra, will be graduating from California Lutheran University this year with a degree in psychology of dance and will be graduating from high school in June.”

1990 Hilary Lang Greenbaum visits in Los Angeles and is lately busy forming a string quartet. She and her husband, Dan, are residents of Marin Academy and have been living in San Francisco for the past three years.

1991 “I am teaching drama at the American School in London for the past five years, and taught a photography Minicourse at the School in 1987. I have been working as the lead writer, and in other creative and managerial capacities, for the interior design of the new(ish) House of Bumble in the Meatpacking District in NYC. Visitors are very welcome. No children to report (thank god) but proud uncle to Max. I’m having dinner tonight with Sandy Brebner ’74 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Christopher Boyes ’74 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Jason Rezaian ’94 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Beth Sherman ’93 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Lisa Baron Haet ’96 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Chanda Barron ’97 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Abigail Hamilton ’89 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Jessica Harris Leon ’90 to view a rough cut of her new film. Congratulations to Benny B. Yee ’87 to view a rough cut of her new film.

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1997 Congratulations to Christopher Boyes and his team who received an award.

1998 Congratulations to Sam and her husband Dan in Hawaii in 2005.

1999 Congratulations to Lisa Baron Haet and her husband Peter Schreiber.

2000 Congratulations to the Class of 1996 Beth Sherman and Andrew Winkler.

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In 1971, Marin Academy was founded as the first co-educational, non-sectarian, independent school in Marin County. Looking ahead to our 35th Anniversary year, we invite the community to join us in celebration as we salute this milestone and the enduring vitality of MA’s founding purpose.

### 35th Anniversary Calendar

**2006**
- September 19: Founders Day
- October 12-13: Conference on Democracy
- October 13: Mill Valley Film Festival
- October 23: Paul Taylor Dance Company

**2007**
- January 5: Young Alumni Reunion
- February 12-16: Literary Festival
- **March 23**: 35th Anniversary Gala and concert with the Doobie Brothers
- TBD: James F. Thacher Lecture
- June 2: Graduation

**SAVE THE DATE!**

On Friday, March 23, 2007, Marin Academy will celebrate its 35th Anniversary with a Gala party and concert with the Doobie Brothers at the Marin Center Theater. This will be an event for the ages...don’t miss it! Look for details in the months ahead.