



The Little School Alumni Newsletter

Faculty Highlight: Mike Murphy

Q: How long have you been at The Little School? What brought you here?

Mike: I've been at TLS for 28 years, but not all at once. I left after eight years to work for Hopelink, but one day at the end of my annual contract I got a call from Margaret Fitzgerald, former assistant head, saying, "Hey, have you ever thought about coming back here? As far as getting here, all my life, my favorite jobs have been working with kids, so I probably should have known it was going to happen, even after doing other pretty cool stuff.

Q: Did you ever meet Eleanor Siegl, the founder of The Little School? If so, what do you remember most about her?

Mike: Eleanor was still on campus, did my second interview, ending it with, "So, we'll see you Monday?" When I announced my departure, she asked if I thought I'd be staying in social services or considering a return to education in some form. I said that I doubted I would, but Eleanor, in her knowing-without-saying way, just smiled and said, "We'll see." (Refer to answer #1.)

Q: What are some of the more significant changes you have observed in your years at TLS?

Mike: The houses next door come to mind; they buttress against the south end of the property, which was once known as the "Forbidden Zone" by kids in the oldest classes ... old structures and rusted-out cars being the most fascinating features. In the end, noticed, but not really missed. The structure of Extended Day is major! That was my first job, and our budget was challenging. No available opportunities like enrichment classes. Still fun, though! Of course, addition by subtraction (no Schoolhouse, new building) is at the top of the list.

Q: Are there any student or teacher stories that stand out more than the rest?

Mike: We have so many notable alumni, including a restaurant baron, a student who went on to play major college tennis, entrepreneurs and teachers. One of my favorite memories is of Melissa Rice (now a NASA rocket scientist) walking across the Big Field with her forever friend Curran Tuck, simultaneously rehearsing their song and dance for their favorite cartoon, "Darkwing Duck." I also think about another student, Katherine Coty. Katy





was extremely shy and, like many students, was still growing into her sense of self as she outgrew the school. Several years later, we were at the All-Schools Conference, which was at Catlin Gabel. I was on my way to a session, when I heard, "Mike! Mike!" and running up to give me one of the biggest hugs ever was Katy Coty, full of confidence and on her way to present her own session around working with introverted children. She'd made it a point of seeking out Kathi Titus (former teacher) and myself. (I was Kathi's TA at the time). She said she wanted to thank us both, because through all she was growing into, she knew that each day she was going to sing and laugh. Wow ... we knew them then, and they keep touching our hearts.

Q: How did you get involved with diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, and in what ways have you observed an increase in our work with that at TLS?

Mike: It really comes down to deciding to take on the responsibility. History and my ancestors have always reminded me that this is great weight that must be carried. When I would balk, some of my Southern family members would say, "that's alright, you'll know when it's time". At TLS I think of this less in terms of increase and more of "important consistency"; being addressed daily at all levels. I happily think of the increased work as genuine commitment to make this part of curriculum programmatic rather than to follow the "tourism approach" so common in school programs across the country.



Q: Your story telling talent is one of the favorite things for students. How did you get started with that?

Mike: To the best of my recollection, a group of morning Extended Day kids were complaining about the rules, and I countered with, "Oh yeah? Well, when I was a kid..." and it was off to the races. There was even one kid, Josh Levinson, who would stand on a chair when things were a bit unruly, and yell, "When I was a kid..." and hand me a pencil-microphone (most of the time, it worked)! For reading groups, voices and emoting has often helped to draw in students less interested in listening, and gotten some challenging kids more interested in their own reading and story writing growth.



Q: You have been our D.H. (designated hitter/person of many hats) for many years at school. Has that always been your role?

Mike: Nope! Peter B-H, Barb Cartmell and I were having a conversation one day. I think we had a group moment of clarity, realized there was a way to make my tendency to be in lots of places intentional and purposeful.

Q: You are quite the table tennis aficionado and player. How old were you when you started playing?

Mike: It's only been about 11 years. My knees just looked at me one day and said, "You know tennis is over, right?" A friend of mine who was a junior player in Bulgaria said, "Michael, you should try ping pong." I replied, "Yeah, ping pong, haha right." The next day, I went to his club at 10:00 in the morning and was there until 10:00 closing. My wife wasn't even mad; she was just hopeful it would be less expensive (oops).

Q: Now that we have a gym, do you think we could start a table tennis club at TLS?

Mike: Not only do I think about TT at TLS, I have equipment priced out. 😊 Did you know that table tennis is the world's fastest growing sport? Along with chess and music, it has a strong link to personal growth in children. There are four clubs in Bellevue, including Seattle Pacific TT, about 4 minutes away from campus. There are opportunities for this to be an enrichment area (with tables on campus), and maybe even the second team sport (along with Ultimate Frisbee) at TLS!

Q: What is your favorite thing about working at TLS?

Mike: Another difficult one to answer. Right now, being encouraged to incorporate my genuine self with teaching and working with other folks is top of mind, but ask again tomorrow.

It's tomorrow. Kids, families, great colleagues, beautiful campus, flexibility, support, school community, creativity, autonomy, program history ...



PI DAY 2012

Left: Before with Niall Snapp

Right: After with Alice Hauschka

