It has been an affirming experience, returning to Montessori East in this role four years after my youngest son completed his primary education here. I am reminded of an evening in 2005 at Sydney Grammar School where my two elder boys (alumni of Montessori East) were then pupils.

The headmaster, Dr Valance, emphatically asked parents not to judge him by their sons’ HSC results, but by who they are in their 40s and beyond. I liked the implied shift of emphasis from the narrow, immediate and quantitative to the broad, qualitative and future-focused, and believe it is the sensible way to evaluate education. When I speak to our alumni and alumni parents, an overwhelming majority of those who have finished secondary and tertiary education rate Montessori as the most enduringly relevant, and even the best education they had, citing the benefits of freedom with limits, taking responsibility for choosing and completing work, respecting others, dispute resolution, and taking care of our planet to name a few. It is easy to fall in to the trap of high marks being the goal of education, rather than a moderately useful tool.

An interesting characteristic of our alumni community is the apparent disproportionately high number of Montessori East alumni in school leadership positions when they move to other schools. Anecdotally we have a very high number of leaders such as head girls, deputy heads and sports captains among our past pupils; something I am curious to research further when time allows.

Our event in April celebrated and gratefully acknowledged all of our presidents, from 1978 to today, and was generously hosted by current school parents Nick Tobias and Miranda Darling. Some photos of the event are on this page.

We are keen to know what you would like as members of our Montessori East alumni community, and later in the newsletter you’ll have an opportunity to tell us, so please let us know what types of events you’d like, and if you’re keen to share skills, life stories, or maybe mentor other alumni or our pupils.

Enjoy reading about our ME alumni. Keep in touch on Facebook, and we hope to see you soon.

Felicity Jensen
ME Alumni Coordinator
Strengthening our Alumni community is a priority of the 2014 Strategic Plan for the ME Foundation. What better way to do that than to gather together nearly all of our past presidents of the Montessori East School Council and applaud their leadership and commitment to our school over time!

Our Alumni event, held so generously at the home of Nick Tobias and Miranda Darling in April, was a huge success. We had the opportunity to hear stories from thirteen presidents and a member of the original 1978 school council, giving us an amazing perspective of the Montessori East journey: the difficulties overcome and triumphs made!

We came together as a community to generously honour our past and at the same time make connections with friends; old and new. We plan to continue to provide authentic and engaging connections within our Alumni community by establishing programs that provide an enriched community experience. Whether it be events directed at specific age groups; mentoring and skill sharing programs connecting alumni with current students; or an alumni professional network, we would really like to see our ME Alumni continue to grow and benefit from the engagement.

Behind the scenes the board of directors has been establishing robust governance structures and a strategy with long term vision. Undoubtedly the ME Foundation is guided by the goals of Montessori East, supporting initiatives for planned growth of the school in the near future. We plan to support the school Building Fund, ensuring that the vision of ME will continue to expand and flourish.

We continue to support the Montessori East Scholarship Fund, helping those in financial difficulty, and to work towards providing perpetual scholarships for new students otherwise unable to experience a Montessori education, thereby bringing diversity to our community. Thank you to those who have already supported this important initiative. I look forward to many years of happy encounters with our alumni and the continued success of the ME Foundation.

Jackie Vidor
Chair ME Foundation

A CONVERSATION WITH OUR FIRST DIRECTRESS LILLY KURUVITA

Vaucluse Preschool, 1979-1987
ikuruvita@optusnet.com.au

Lilly Kuruvita was an energetic and inspirational directress, and she remains just as inspiring today. Lilly starts each weekday with a gym workout and a swim, no doubt contributing to her infectious vitality. She is actively involved in her local community as a Justice of the Peace, enjoys square dancing, and assists new Sri Lankan immigrants with the challenges of settling in Sydney.

Originally from Austria, Lilly is a London trained Montessori teacher, whose certificate is signed by Dr Maria Montessori’s son Mario. Celebrating the Kuruvita family’s 40-year anniversary of moving from Sri Lanka to Sydney in July, Lilly was delighted with her family’s appreciation of her commitment to Montessori principles when her son Peter wrote “…Montessori upbringing has allowed us to be very diverse in our chosen methods of earning a living, and made us make our own choices in pretty much all of the major decisions...The best is that in real crisis, we have confided in each other as a family, and all have empathised, supported and gently advised”.

Lilly recalls how hard she and the Vaucluse parents worked, and how cooperative and enthusiastic the Montessori East families were. There were always parents volunteering, “I can do that”, and it would be cheerfully done – and there was always more to do!

Her conversation is filled with names of parents and their children, with obvious affection. The strength of the community was impressive, especially in difficult times. “…three Kelly children, who were all in my class in 1987. The middle child Michael had leukemia and the whole school rallied around the family, until shy Michael returned a very confident child when he was in remission. I guess it must have been all the loving attention he got when we were so worried about him”.

Lilly is very fondly remembered and highly respected by the families who were lucky enough to be at our Vaucluse Preschool during her time there. Some say, looking back after experiencing other schools after Montessori, that it was the best education they ever received.

Lilly is a keen traveller, having recently returned from Morocco, Austria, and visiting her pilot son David in Turkey. In March, she will take a World Expeditions tour in Mexico, which is being led by her son Peter.

Peter will be familiar to many, from his SBS series Mexican Fiesta and My Sri Lanka. Lilly’s message is “Life is short and final. Use the time well”. And Lilly is doing just that.

Right, Morning Group 1979: Standing: Christopher Nellis, Matthew Cormyn, Charles Marlin Seated: Lilly Kuruvita, Staney Wright, Danielle Pretty, Brendan and Yasmin Cooley, Mollie Furzer, Farwell Russell, Susan Duff (Assistant), Absent: Kristie Lowy & Michelle Pretty

Lilly Kuruvita, taken by her son, Philip, one of only 15 Master Photographers in Australia
An interview with Lauren Augarten

1989-1992 Vaucluse Preschool
1993-1995 Bronte Public School
1996-1997 Woollahra School OC
1998-2003 Sydney Girls High School
2004-2010 University of Sydney BSc. (Psychology)
& Atlantic Theater School NYC, USA
lauren.augarten@gmail.com

ME: How was the transition from Montessori East to your new school?

LA: Not easy for me, or my Mum. I was mad they never let me take off my shoes, and was bored. At Montessori Mum had a hard time dragging me out the gate to go home. At my new school she had a hard time getting me to go, and dealing with my frustration. I skipped a grade, which helped, but if Montessori Primary had been around then, things would’ve been different, I’m sure!

ME: What do you remember about the transition socially and academically?

LA: I had friends, but I still saw my Montessori friends a lot. Academically, I finished the work quickly, and often had nothing to do. After skipping Year 2 I had a teacher I loved, who would give me things to do if I finished early. Going to Woollahra OC helped. I remember teaching the Year 5s at Bronte the method of long division that I had learned at Montessori!

ME: What do you value about your Montessori experience?

LA: The clear memories. The rest of my schooling has moments that stick out, but I am clearest from ages 2-6. At Montessori I remember friends I made, especially Stella Fabyini, who remains one of my closest friends. I value being pushed out of my comfort zone, like having to speak in the school Christmas play. I had previously played Mary silently, and in my last year, was made to speak.

It was scary, but I did it (that seems weird now having performed on stages all over America!). I value Raji and Bronwyn, helping me to love learning.

ME: What are you doing now?

LA: I work as a writer/producer in Los Angeles, and have a production role on Battle Creek, a new detective drama by Vince Gilligan (creator of Breaking Bad) and David Shore (creator of House). I have also written a series Scissors (2013), and recently acted in Kevin’s Book (2014), a short film. I remember reading Mr Pink Whistle aloud on stage, and how proud I was that I had a chapter book.

I remember bringing my little sister in, hospital fresh, for Show & Tell. I remember being full of confidence and excitement, and loving every day of school. I would very much be interested in being a mentor for other ME Alumni, if I can help from over here.

ME: How did you consider that your Montessori experience influenced your choice of tertiary study, work or other pursuits, or your experience of them?

LA: I’m sure it made me more adventurous. It also brought me one of my closest friends Stella Fabyini, who flew from the UK to New York to support me while I auditioned for acting schools. I don’t know how I would’ve done without her.

ME: Has your Montessori experience influenced the person you are today?

LA: It definitely fostered a love of creativity, learning and imagination, all things I am using today in my career and in life as a whole. I really wish I could’ve stayed at Montessori longer, I think I would have got where I am much faster.

ME: Do you have any more memories of Montessori East you’d like to share?

LA: When I was five, a little girl ( littler than me) showed Raji a picture she had drawn. It was, she proclaimed, a cow. The thing was just scribble, and not even black and white like a cow should be. I watched Raji take the picture, and spend time looking at it. I waited for her, to explain to the girl that cows had a certain shape, and colour, and that she should try again. Instead Raji handed the picture back, looked right into the girls eyes and said to her ‘it’s beautiful’. The girl just beamed.

I asked Raji why she had lied. The picture was not beautiful. It wasn’t even correct. Didn’t she need to learn how to really draw a cow? Raji patiently explained to me that the picture was WAST beautiful. It was beautiful to the girl, and that made it beautiful to Raji. Not all people saw things the same way, and that was okay. I don’t remember the girl’s name, or what she looked like, but I do remember walking back over and taking a second look at her ‘cow’. And Raji was right. It was beautiful. I learned how to treat people, and I learned how to value other people’s feelings the way I valued my own.

A QUICK CATCH UP
Jake & Ellis Silove, 17 & 14

(Wellington St, Bondi 2002-10)
jakesilove@gmail.com
ellis.silove@reddamhouse.com.au

Jake and Ellis are involved with fund raising for and working in orphanages near Tam-Ky, Vietnam. Both boys raised money and went to Tam-Ky in December 2012, and Ellis returned in January 2014. The orphanages are Baby Orphanage, for about 80 newborns to 16 year olds, and Peace Village, for 60 people of all ages, most of whom are disabled by Agent Orange.

While there, the boys assist with whatever is needed, including teaching children and feeding severely disabled adult residents. They use the money raised in Sydney to provide such things as fruit, school fees, bikes and cows.

Jake and Ellis rate this as a very satisfying way to spend school holidays. Jake is in Year 12 at the Emanuel School and Ellis is at Reddam House in Year 9.
Research and opinion about how to best educate children for the 21st century is currently very present in the media. Who should we look to, to choose an optimal model to prepare children for a world that is changing at an accelerating rate? Perhaps we should consider the opinions of successful independent thinkers, and creative leaders and influencers of the modern world.

Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez, winner of Nobel Prize for Literature is a Montessori alumnus who said, “I do not believe there is a method better than Montessori for making children sensitive to the beauties of the world and awakening their curiosity regarding the secrets of life.” His novel One Hundred Years of Solitude is the piece of writing that has most shaped world literature over the past 25 years, according to a survey of international writers. (Alison Flood, The Guardian 2009).

Carol Sanford of The Guardian recently spoke to one of the world’s most successful change agents, Larry Page, who cited his unconventional education as the second of four key influences on his life. Larry Page and Sergey Brin, co-founders of Google attended Montessori schools until they entered high school.

They say the Montessori method was the major influence in designing Google’s work systems. Montessori is also the source of Google’s culture of collaboration, generating social benefits, and encouraging engineers to dedicate 20% of work time to projects of personal interest.

Page says he is recreating the inspiring learning environment he had as a child, where the focus was on growing free people with the capacity to transform society. During his Montessori school days “students were allowed large chunks of uninterrupted time to work on projects they created themselves, and were encouraged to take on small-scale but real-world challenges and to invent ways to solve them”.

The extremely high representation of Montessori students among change makers and leading the creative industries is causing widespread interest. Peter Sims of The Wall Street Journal calls it The Montessori Mafia, and it includes the founders of Amazon, Wikipedia, and the inventor of creative planning and building games, Sim City.

In Thailand, the government’s Office of Education has embraced the Montessori methodology, opening over 300 Montessori schools since 2004.

Hundreds of primary and preschool teachers have been trained in conjunction with AMI (Association Montessori Internationale). Our principal Bill Conway is a highly regarded educator internationally, and he spent the July school holidays in Thailand working with Thai school principals, advising them about managing Montessori classrooms as a school leader. He enjoyed seeing the methodology so widely embraced, and viewed as the model for the future.

Debate continues as to the best way to educate children for the future, but it appears very safe to say Montessori principles are as contemporary and relevant as ever.

Bill & children in Thailand

ME ALUMNI TODAY

An interview with Anthony Confos, 22

1994-2001 Montessori Pre & Primary School, Vaucluse and Bronte
2002-2009 The Scots College
2010-2012 BCom (Accounting & Finance), UNSW

Present
Senior Adviser,
Private Enterprise, KPMG

ME Alumni: What do you remember about your transition from Montessori East to The Scots College?

Anthony Confos: It was easy. I think I’m pretty adaptable. The workload was about the same at Scots. There was homework, but that wasn’t anything dramatic. I just remember getting used to a uniform.

MEA: What do you value most about your Montessori experience?

AC: I value the adaptive learning, choosing work and going at your own pace. The learning is so ‘hands on’ at Montessori and I really value that.

My Montessori experience has made me very open-minded about people, in every area of life.

I value the friendships very highly and am still in touch with Montessori friends. They are different friendships from others I have made; in that we grew up together and have total acceptance of each other. They are the type of friendships that are able to be picked up from years ago with no awkwardness present.

MEA: Do you think your Montessori experience influenced your choice of tertiary study or work?

AC: Yes. Montessori gave me a love of Maths that has endured, and so I wanted to study Commerce. I always loved working with all the mathematical materials. The materials meant that you could feel and physically represent mathematical concepts, and that is so valuable.

MEA: What are you doing now?

AC: I am working in the “Private Enterprise” area at KPMG. That’s essentially tax accounting for small-medium privately listed companies and medium-high net worth individuals.

I really enjoy it, and I like the people and the office environment.

MEA: How has your Montessori experience influenced the person you are today?

AC: It’s made me very independent about my choices. I choose what I want to do, and don’t follow the rest of the world. Montessori is an environment in which people always help each other, and that became a habit and is part of who I am. It is natural for me to step in and help people when I see an opportunity.

MEA: Do you have a funny memory of Montessori you’d like to share?

AC: One of the funniest moments I remember of Montessori was at pre-school with Raji in Vaucluse. I can’t exactly recall what happened but I remember pointing my index finger at Raji and screaming on the top of my lungs, “you be rude to me” because I did not get my way with something.

I will always remember how good it was being hosed down on hot days in Vaucluse.
**A QUICK CATCH UP**

**Olivia Abbott, 15**
(Wellington St, Bondi  
Preschool and Primary 2002-2010)
olivia.jesse.a@gmail.com

Olivia is working towards her Grade 8 piano exam, plays contemporary guitar, and loves to compose and sing. Currently in Year 10, she will take Music 2 in Composition for the HSC.

Recently Olivia entered Triple J’s Unearthed “High 2014” competition for high school students.

You can listen here and like her facebook if you’d like to hear more.

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**What would you like?**
We are interested to know what you would like as members of our Montessori East alumni community.

**Would you like to attend events such as:**
- Dinners?
- Talks or debates?
- Evening events like the event in April?
- Would you join a Montessori East professional or business network?
- Events for your age group? Do you have other ideas?

**Would you like to be involved:**
- Sharing your skills with our current pupils?
- Talking to current pupils about your work or life experience?
- Do you have other ideas?
- Be as specific or as general as you like, but please let us know here.

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**Are you in touch with other alumni of Montessori East?**
If you are in touch with other alumni who you think may like to receive the newsletter, invitations and very occasional correspondence, please pass on their details here.

We will ask permission before adding them to our database.

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**Jeremy Bond**
(Ocean St, Bondi Preschool, 1985-7)
jb@terracapital.com.au

Jeremy’s family moved to Perth when Jeremy was 9, and he lived there and in the UK until recently, returning with his wife Olivia to live in Sydney. Jeremy has a background in investment banking, degrees in Commerce, Economics and Arts, and he successfully established Terracapital in 2010.

Jeremy and Olivia are very excited to welcome their first baby, a daughter, in August.

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**Mimi Hayton, 24**
mimi.hayton@gmail.com

Mimi writes from Morocco, en route to London to live. Since she graduated from Sydney University with a Bachelor of Design in Architecture, Mimi has enjoyed working for the Customer Experience Company, combining management consulting and creative design practice.

Mimi has always loved film, and sees writing as her greatest talent. She would like to work in film or media, or to expand her creative consulting skills. She is eagerly anticipating London life.

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**The Judd Family**
juddfamily@btopenworld.com

**Hayden, 21**
Randwick Preschool & Bronte Primary 1996-2000
Hayden is studying Maths & Economics at Nottingham University and is very homesick for Australia, especially since spending a gap year here.

**Eleanor, 19**
Randwick Preschool 1998-2000
Eleanor is studying Biology at University College, London but her main passion is sewing.

**and parents Brian & Ros Judd**
Ros and Brian live in the beautiful Kent countryside, having moved to the UK in 2000, but still miss Bronte! Ros is the Exams Officer at Benenden School and Brian teaches Maths at Marlborough House, Hawkhurst.
A QUICK CATCH UP

The Fitzsimons Family

Sarah, 28
(Ocean St Bondi Preschool 1987-9)
Sarah is an environmental engineer, married to fellow mining engineer Mitch Parton, and loving living in Muswellbrook. They spent three months in South America a few years ago and would love to travel more with their work before having children.

Nikki, 27
(Ocean St Bondi Preschool 1989-91)
Nikki is a lawyer, and a senior associate in the Environmental Energy and Planning Division of law firm Ashurst (formerly Blake Dawson). She did an exchange in Copenhagen as a student and hopes to do further study overseas, maybe in the Human Rights field.

Tom, 23
(Ocean St Bondi Preschool 1994-96)
Tom is travelling, currently in the USA, working as a Summer Camp Counsellor. He has an AIM Music Performance & Management degree and is interested in permaculture and yoga. He did a yoga instructor’s course in Pachumama, Costa Rica while living there for five months in the jungle tuning in with nature.

and parents Sandie Di Bella & Fitz (Steve) Fitzsimons
Sandie loves the arts environment, and works part time as the Art Gallery of NSW’s in house legal adviser. This includes advising on the Sydney Modern Project, the Gallery’s major vision to expand the Gallery as a museum for the 21st century and beyond.

Steve is a tax partner in accounting practice Hill Roger Spencer Steer. He is a keen City to Surf participant, having run every year from the first ever City to Surf in 1975, minus a few years when the children were small. Sandie now does it too, in support of EchoStars, a charity educating impoverished children in Bangladesh.

Steve and Sandie celebrated 35 years of marriage with a Hummingbird Retreat cruise in July around the remote reefs and islands of South Lombok in a Bugis Prahu—a traditional wooden pirate ship – with 12 guests and 12 crew (all apparently ex-pirates!), a chef trained by Gordon Ramsay, and expedition leader Dr Lawrence Blair, of the BBC series “Ring of Fire”.

Sandie is also on the board of not-for-profit Euraupair/ASSE (a former client). Its mission is to spread world peace through cultural exchange and understanding by organising international student exchanges, language and training programs, and placing au pairs to foster cultural exchange. After their November board meeting in Georgia, she and Steve will meet Tom and travel around the south of the USA.

Scholarships at Montessori East
Montessori East is a cohesive school community. Students, parents and alumni often speak of the community as the most rewarding part of their experience at Montessori East. A small school community provides many obvious benefits – especially a finite and manageable number of people with great opportunities to get to know each other and build strong bonds. However, a small community is also more vulnerable, and more likely to feel a real sense of loss when a child leaves the school.

Scholarships in the form of fee assistance, is one way in which we help to maintain the integrity of our school community. From time to time we reach out to families who cannot access the unique education we offer due to financial constraints. In the true spirit of a caring community, the helping hand has not only drawn into the school students who wouldn’t otherwise be able to attend, we have also assisted existing families in the school in order to preserve the class communities which may suffer if a child is withdrawn when a family is under financial pressure.

Without our Scholarship Program we would not be able to provide this help. While the school community as a whole has partially funded the program through a small allocation in our annual budget, the Scholarship Fund is growing and we now rely more than ever on the voluntary tax-deductible donations being received.

Recipients are chosen based on need, and must go through a thorough process of application and approval prior to being offered the assistance. These families are part of our community and therefore part of all children’s experience at school.

We do not reveal to the community our scholarship recipients, but you can be assured that the Montessori East community values every child and family, and works to be as inclusive and diverse as possible. If you have already donated to the Scholarship Fund, appreciate how your participation may be helping a child’s peer group or the school community as a whole, as well as offering to someone in need the finest education available in Sydney.

FROM OUR PRINCIPAL, BILL CONWAY

Scholarships at Montessori East

Bill Conway

If you wish to make a tax-deductible donation to the Montessori East Scholarship Fund or a general donation to the ME Foundation please do so here.