Welcome to the ME Alumni Newsletter.

Creating these newsletters is so enjoyable; talking to interesting, inspiring young people, and hearing about their lives. It's also fun to talk to parents of alumni, many of whom now have independent children and are pursuing diverse activities in their work, for pleasure, or for the joy of making a positive contribution to the world.

Our event in March was generously hosted by David Hendler and Rena Shein, parents of alumnae Shane and Maya (1995-2006). Six alumni spoke, introduced by our first directress Lilly Kuruvita (Vaucluse 1979-87). The warm friendly atmosphere is captured in the photos on this page.

We have decided to bring you shorter newsletters more often, rather than a long annual read. Please let us know your news, and also feel free to let us know about those who are too modest to tell us themselves about what they are up to. Our feature about Brooke Goldfinch came to us this way. Brooke's mother Mary modestly changes the subject when asked about her daughters, and we heard about Brooke through a current school parent, who says Brooke exhibits the same traits! We will always ask people if they are happy to be in our newsletter if you send us a tip-off.

Enjoy reading about our ME Alumni. Keep in touch on facebook, and we look forward to seeing you soon.

Felicity Jensen
ME Alumni Coordinator
Montessori East is dear to so many of our hearts. We recognize the positive influence this education has had on our children, and on us as parents, and it shows in the willingness of families to support our school well beyond our children’s school years.

The generosity of our alumni and current Montessori East parents makes working with the ME Foundation such a great pleasure. I am constantly amazed by the ongoing commitment from our families, of their ‘talent, treasure and time’!

TALENT
The ME Foundation goal of creating authentic and engaging connections between stakeholders has led us to form the mentoring and skill sharing program where alumni parents and/or students can engage with current students at Montessori East. We are excited to have a growing list of volunteers who are willing to share their experiences in the classroom. The ME Foundation is also grateful to have alumni sharing expertise at the board level, ensuring we operate in the most rigorous way.

TREASURE
Thank you so much to those who supported our recent launch of the Annual Giving Program that focuses on our Scholarship Fund. Financial hardship is a reality, and this program not only benefits individual families seeking assistance but the entire school community by maintaining diversity and peer groups. Thank you again for your ongoing support of this important initiative!

TIME
Our annual event was held at the remarkable home of David Hendler and Rena Shein. We were privileged to hear from some of our alumni students, their enthusiasm about their current pursuits an inspiring reminder of the strength of the Montessori philosophy in giving the gift of self assurance.

The ME Foundation would not be where it is today without the generous commitment of time from its board members; Simon Bassett, Peter Shorthouse, honorary member Raji Sivapalan, Nick Tobias, and our newest member, Sandra Fairfax. I would also like to acknowledge our school principal, Bill Conway for always providing wise counsel and Felicity Jensen, who continues to play a vital role in the development of the foundation and ME Alumni.

Jackie Vidor
Chair, ME Foundation

THE WORDS OF ALBERT EINSTEIN

We came across this quote by Albert Einstein in which he beautifully articulates what he felt is the role of education. It reveals an ambitious and holistic view that you’d expect from such a man, yet what he describes simply makes perfect sense. In essence it describes the Montessori philosophy, considering the whole child, giving equal weight to their emotional, social and academic development.

“It is not enough to teach a man a specialty. Through it he may become a kind of useful machine but not a harmoniously developed personality. It is essential that the student acquire an understanding of and a lively feeling for values. He must acquire a vivid sense of the beautiful and of the morally good. Otherwise he - with his specialized knowledge - more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person. He must learn to understand the motives of human beings, their illusions and their sufferings, in order to acquire a proper relationship to individual fellow men and to the community.

These precious things are conveyed to the younger generation through personal contact with those who teach, not - or at least not in the main - through textbooks. It is this that primarily constitutes and preserves culture. This is what I have in mind when I recommend the ‘humanities’ as important, not just dry specialized knowledge in the fields of history and philosophy.

Overemphasis on the competitive system and premature specialization on the ground of immediate usefulness kill the spirit on which all cultural life depends, specialized knowledge included.

It is also vital to a valuable education that independent critical thinking be developed in the young human being, a development that is greatly jeopardized by overburdening him with too much and with too varied subjects. Overburdening necessarily leads to superficiality. Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty.”

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- Wellington St, Bondi Primary
- Amalia, 2008-13
- Christian, 2006-11

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- Wellington St, Bondi Preschool & Primary, 2003-11

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- Parents of Pia
- Vaucluse Preschool, 1993-5

Living his dream of sailing around the world, Darrell Williamson spent 14 months sailing 20,000km in multihull ‘Dasha Way’, with Jan joining him for much of the time. The photo is Jan and Darrell in mid-summer in the Bay of Biscay, complete with thermals!

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ME Alumni:
Congratulations on your award for Best Director of a Short Film, at the Sydney Film Festival this year. It’s a fine achievement. Can you tell us about the film?

Brooke Goldfinch: The film is called Red Rover. It’s a fifteen minute end of days drama about two teenagers from a remote religious community who travel to town in search of shelter after being told by their evangelical parents that an asteroid will soon destroy the earth.

MEA: Was it made in Australia?

BG: No it was shot in upstate New York, but I was fortunate to be awarded funding through the Screen Australia Talent Escalator Program for the post-production so we came home to finish the film.

MEA: You’ve recently completed the masters program in filmmaking at the prestigious Tisch School of the Arts as a scholarship student. How was that?

BG: It was a great opportunity, being taught by some of the world’s best directors and actors, like James Franco, Spike Lee and Todd Solondz. It was very practical and film focused, whereas my course at UNSW gave me a broader education in media and film theory. I have since been in LA for a while, and returned to live in Sydney last year. I think Sydney is a good place for young filmmakers at the moment. I’m very happy to be in Sydney.

MEA: You were an early pupil of Montessori East, before we had a primary school. Do you think there is anything from your Montessori education that you particularly value, or that has influenced the choices you’ve made since?

BG: Yes. We all did a lot with our hands, and were encouraged to master every activity. It made me realise I could master any skill if I wanted to. I was given the opportunity by being left to keep trying something until I could do it. I remember really struggling with the zipper, and keeping on trying. I’ve mastered it now! Women are generally not encouraged into technical pursuits, and I think being so hands-on at Montessori meant I was comfortable with pursuing a technical career.

The teachers at Montessori East have a great community mindedness and there is always a goodness and empathy.

MEA: Do you think it’s influenced the person you are today in any other way?

BG: Yes. Montessori was a very creative environment. It fostered an independent spirit and curiosity. There was so much colour, and I loved doing plays at pre-school. I loved sitting in the circle with everyone else hearing stories.

MEA: What are you working on now?

BG: Currently I’m working on my first feature film, called Pretty Lucy. It’s a crime drama about a woman who becomes obsessed with her lover. I’ll be seeking funding for it shortly, and plan to be in production early in 2016.

MEA: I guess your experience working as a political and crime reporter for the ABC will have been useful for this! Best wishes for the new film.

You can see more about Brooke’s work at http://brookegoldfinch.com/