

# A long road to higher education

Peninsula Heritage students benefit from the worldly experiences of their Head of School

by JOAN ERZER BEHRENS

**“PENINSULA HERITAGE SCHOOL** won my heart the first time I walked up the steps holding my little boy’s hand to enter preschool,” explains PHS Head of School Patricia Cailler. “My son will soon be going for his Ph.D., and the loving, caring environment continues to be a hallmark of Peninsula Heritage. Simultaneously, we have advanced our academic, artistic, and technological programs to new levels.”

The individual responsible for leading this growth and change is an educator in every fiber of her being with teaching experience in three states and in France. Growing up in northeastern Ohio, she earned undergraduate and advanced degrees in education from Kent State University, as well as certifications in reading and special education at the University of Akron. She began her career instructing the children of migrant workers in Ohio, and moved to Massachusetts for its schools’ full inclusion programs.

At the urging and with the accompaniment of her best friend, Cailler took a trip that changed her life. The two young women traveled to Finland, and one day in Helsinki Patricia saw an ad for a visa-free trip to Russia. This was a rarity during the Cold War, and Patricia and her friend were soon aboard the ship. What she didn’t know was that a young Frenchman, Alain Cailler, had spotted her and was determined to win her heart. Pat spoke no French and Alain no English, so the two conversed through their traveling companions, Alain’s brother and their professor friend.

Pat recalls, “Alain was very generous; there was champagne with dinner every night, and he was teaching me French all the while on a Russian ship. At the conclusion of the voyage, we exchanged addresses, said our good-byes, and I took a ship to Stockholm. Imagine my surprise to find that he was on this ship, too. He had booked passage late, and there was no availability, so he slept in a bed outside on the deck.”

Pat returned to her school in Massachusetts. The following July, when Alain stepped off the plane for a visit, he was speaking English, thanks to a private tutor and BBC language tapes. The two

were soon married in France and lived there for five years, where Alain was a magistrate judge, and where Pat opened a preschool in Brittany. She also tutored fifth-year high school students and taught English to adults and senior citizens.

When the couple decided to move to the U.S., Alain chose Southern California as the ideal place to reside. Although she was credentialed in Ohio and Massachusetts, Pat earned her K-12 California teaching credential at California Lutheran University, then taught special education and served as a resource specialist in Huntington Park. Pat also worked evenings at the Switzer Center after the birth of the couple’s son, Mathieu.

After her child enrolled at Peninsula Heritage, the then-Headmaster Mark Hale invited Pat to teach reading to three students at the school. From this part-time position, Pat began teaching gifted students at PHS, started working as the curriculum specialist, and then was asked by the Board of Trustees to be interim head. That was eight years ago, and Pat continues as Head of School, utilizing her considerable education and experience for the improvement of the teaching and learning at Peninsula Heritage.

“We recognize that each child is unique. We can’t say that often enough – each child is unique, and we offer multiple opportunities for students to be fully challenged in academics with a healthy dose of technology. For gifted students, we have advancement programs in mathematics and English that are inclusive of the child’s social development, as well as offering remediation for those needing assistance. Visiting parents remark that ‘These kids are so happy!’ They are also respectful. That comes from

our award-winning Character Qualities program, which permeates our entire curriculum and teaching philosophy from science to P.E.”

Walking around the Peninsula Heritage campus at Rolling Hills Road and P.V. Drive North confirms this observation. How fortunate these students are that Patricia Cailler followed her heart and her mind on her teaching path from Ohio to Massachusetts to France and then to Peninsula Heritage School. PEN



Peninsula Heritage Head of School, Patricia Cailler with Alexis, a student at Peninsula Heritage School.