



Park Profiles

Summer 2012

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Proudly Park!

As we celebrate the Centennial of The Park School of Buffalo, we are pleased to profile alumni and members of our community whose stories we feel are interesting to all.



Alumni Profile

**DR. NNENNA
KALAYA OKEREKE**

Class of 1987

Classmates of “Sisi” Okereke probably did not realize they had a future doctor of psychiatry in their midst when they graduated from Park School in 1987. In hindsight, however, there was some foreshadowing.

Okereke’s senior project was conducted at Buffalo General Hospital, where she served as a volunteer on the Medical Teaching Unit. That sparked an interest in medicine, she recalls. Okereke went to college at Harvard, where she majored in psychology. Her interests in psychology and medicine led her to consider psychiatry, she said, and a career was born.

Dr. Nnenna Kalaya Okereke today is an attending psychiatrist at the Zucker Hillside Hospital of the North Shore-Long Island Jewish Health System in Glen Oaks, NY. She also holds faculty appointments as assistant professor of psychiatry at the Hofstra North Shore-Long Island Jewish School of Medicine and adjunct assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

Dr. Okereke’s patients range in age from 4 to 18. “These parents bring their children into the office, and are entrusting you with the care of their children, which is kind of a big responsibility,” she said. “But at the same time, when someone is doing better ... and you can kind of help facilitate making that difference I think that’s part of what makes it rewarding. And there’s also the fact that the kids are really fun. Younger kids are very playful. There are always toys and things in my office. The older ones, they are making transitions themselves. It takes me back to the times when I was at Park. So you help them through those transitions.”

Okereke made a career transition of her own after graduating from Harvard. She was accepted at UB Medical School, but opted to defer admission for a year. Soon after she was offered a position in a UB

program called the School-College- University Partnership in which she was sent to teach for a year in two inner-city Buffalo schools.

“They wanted to get recent college graduates to help the students reach their best potential and they wanted to identify the pool of students who they thought had a lot of potential to do well academically but for various reasons were not perhaps living up to their potential. And so they wanted us to kind of do some enrichment programs to help them out.”

Then it was on to medical school at UB. Okereke did a residency in general psychiatry at the University of Virginia, then headed to New York Presbyterian Hospital to do a fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry.

Okereke started at Park in pre-Kindergarten and stayed on through the end of Upper School. “One of the biggest influences from a young age was June Watt. She was one of the nursery school teachers and even though I was very young I have great memories of her.

“In high school there were so many great teachers. Some that stood out were the late Dr. Raoul Hailpern, he was a mathematics teacher; Stephen Dombrowski, a history teacher; Sharon Lohmann was an English teacher.”

Okereke also has a brother and two sisters who graduated from Park. She and her siblings took full advantage of all that the school had to offer.

“Park is, as you know, an environment that is very welcoming and encourages you to try different things, so I tried to do as many things as I could. I think my main focus by the time I got to high school was the literary publication, *Miled Road*.” She also served in student government and played volleyball and basketball.

Okereke feels the education she got in her formative years at Park was quite important to her. “The thing about Park that I found the most helpful, the most nurturing, was you were exposed to everything you needed to be exposed to, and you could kind of learn at your own pace.

“You are given so much support from your teachers and your fellow students. It was a very self-driven kind of learning experience, which for me was very helpful. Of course the size of it, the smaller classes, and having more interaction with your teacher and more personal attention was also very helpful.”



Do you know someone we should feature in a future “Park Profiles” newsletter?
Please send your suggestions: development@theparkschool.org or call 716-839-1243x104.



Alumni Profile

BEN OBLETZ

Class of 1995

It's hard to pick up a newspaper or magazine today without seeing an article about how U.S. Rust Belt cities are making a comeback. In Buffalo, Park School graduate Ben Oblatz has been a central player in the rebirth of downtown.

Oblatz is President of First Amherst Development Group, a commercial real estate company that is headquartered on Main Street in Snyder, a short walk from Park's campus. The company was founded by his grandfather, the late Bernie Oblatz, back in 1958. For many years, the company was oriented toward suburban development. However, a downtown venture in the early 2000s took the company in a new direction.

BIO

YEARS AT PARK: 1988–1995

ACTIVITIES: Theatre, school store

COLLEGE: University at Buffalo

CAREER: President, First Amherst Development Group

"About 10 years ago, we went down to the city of Buffalo when very few people would consider the city a nice place to live or a fun place to live," Oblatz said. "We did this project, the Lofts at Elk Terminal," on Scott Street near Michigan Avenue, two blocks away from First Niagara Center.

"It was the first adaptive re-use housing project, probably the first loft project that had ever been done in Buffalo," he said. "We converted an old truck terminal warehouse building into apartments. There are 72 of them down there today and they are full every month. It's been a terrific success for us."

In 2006, Oblatz and his First Amherst project team completed the \$6.5 million development of The Granite Works, a mixed-use development on Main Street downtown. That project won the company several preservation awards.

Oblatz himself was honored as one of *Buffalo Business First's* 40 Under Forty in 2011. He was also named Best Developer in WNY by *Buffalo Spree* in 2007, and was designated as Horizons Citizen of the Year in 2007 by the Boy Scouts of America. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Buffalo Urban Development Corporation and the Buffalo Niagara Partnership. He co-chaired the Buffalo Building Reuse Commission, established by Mayor Byron W. Brown in 2010.

"I co-chaired it with Bob Shibley [Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the University at Buffalo], and Christina Orsi, who is the Regional Director of Empire State Development. We spent a year studying what can we be doing to affect change and

development and reuse over the great old building stock that Western New York has." Oblatz said Western New York is starting to see a lot of "stakeholder investment" downtown.

"People opening restaurants, people opening nightclubs, people opening apartment complexes. We have been really lucky to be part of that, the whole resurgence of downtown."

After graduating from Park, Oblatz studied Business Management at the University at Buffalo. He then worked for Realmark Properties for several years before joining the family business.

His family ties at Park School also run deep.

"My grandmother graduated [from Park] back in 1939. Then my father, in the class of '66. Three of his siblings graduated from Park School. And then his wife -- my stepmother -- graduated from Park School and I also had three siblings who graduated from Park. So there is a long lineage of Parkies."

Douglas Oblatz, Ben's uncle, is another Park graduate. He lives in Portland, OR, and in the 1990s he founded a development company out there affiliated with First Amherst.

Oblatz started at Park in pre-kindergarten, when June Watt was teaching. He left for another school for several years, then finished 6th through 12th grades at Park. He remembers having "a lot of great teachers over those years."

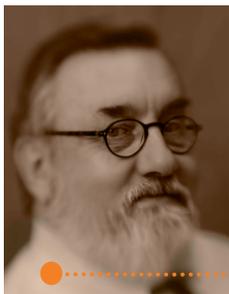
For three years, Ben helped to run the school store in the old dining room in Lewis Hall. He also was involved with several theater productions, working mostly behind the scenes. And he remains involved to this day, serving on Park's facilities committee.

"The backstage of the theater was a great learning experience for me. Dealing with contractors and dealing with a number of people and solving problems, I really learned a lot.

"I certainly took a lot of classes, business classes, and history classes and so forth, but I think in retrospect, 17 years later, the learning experiences that I had both inside and especially outside the classroom were very beneficial to me in life every day.

"Park afforded me an education that was very much specific to how I learned best," he said. "I was able to get involved with things at Park that were a great learning experience."





Alumni Profile

EUGENE F. PROVENZO, JR.

Class of 1968

Before he arrived at Park School for sixth grade, Eugene Provenzo attended public school “rather unsuccessfully,” he recalls. “I was a very bright kid, but bright in ways that people did not necessarily understand. I was very creative. When I got to Park, there were people who said, ‘Yeah, being creative is a good thing.’”

He laughs when recalling that Park made him repeat sixth grade. “I was upset when they put me back, but now I think it was a very wise thing for them to do. It gave me a chance to kind of catch up and mature.” There has been no holding him back since. Provenzo skipped a year of college at the University of Rochester and two years of graduate school at Washington University. He is the author of more than 100 books, including one, “Video Kids: Making Sense of Nintendo (1991),” that is considered by many to be the book that founded the field of video game studies.

Provenzo has worked as a professor at the University of Miami since 1976, earning the rank of full professor in 1985. In addition to teaching, he has served as the research coordinator and then as associate dean for research for the School of Education. His primary focus, he says, has been on education “as a social and cultural phenomenon,” including “the role of the teacher in American society, as well as experimental education.”

It is very challenging to try to describe his wide range of academic interests and accomplishments. His research on computers and video games have made him a sought-after interview subject for the news media.

Provenzo spoke one late-winter afternoon from the 1866 home he shares with his wife, Asterie B. Provenzo, in Staunton, VA. He was on sabbatical from Miami, though by no means idle. Provenzo was in the process of launching a new university press, which will publish its first books this summer. “And then I am starting another press, which is going to deal with local history and Civil War history,” he said.

“I’ve been passionately interested in history partially because of my father; he was a social studies teacher and he went on to become a

principal. Essentially it was pushed much farther by Bill Hoyt [at Park School]... That was my favorite class.” Other Park teachers summon fond memories, too.

“In terms of English and composition Allen Thomas probably taught me the most about writing. And I worked with a wonderful science teacher, Ed Barnes. He taught biological sciences and he got me into writing and creating notebooks and I think it was a part of learning how to write books.”

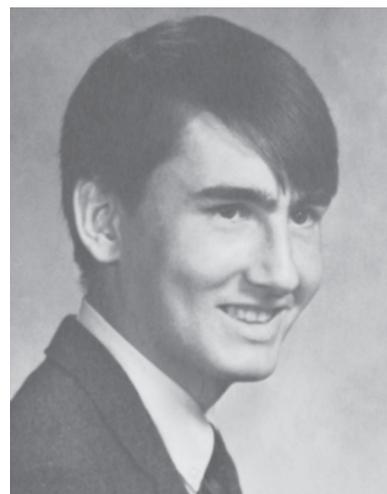
Mr. Barnes had a somewhat unorthodox approach to education in which he stressed learning by doing, Provenzo said. “I think one of the important things about Park for me was within the structure of a serious disciplinary approach, he did a lot of messing around—which consisted of experiments and trying different things, researching a topic from different ways. I think what that did for me was it created in me the means by which to approach a problem and encouraged my natural curiosity.”

Provenzo’s mother, Therese M. Provenzo, was also a major influence in his life. She taught at Park from the early 1960s through the mid ‘80s, also serving at various times as Head of the Middle and Lower Schools. Eugene Provenzo wrote the preface to the 2011 edition of *An Adventure with Children* by Park founder Mary Hammett Lewis. In his preface, Provenzo reflected on his mom’s commitment to Park’s educational philosophies. Terri Provenzo passed away in December 2008.

“If she were here now, Terri would ask, ‘What is the relevance of learning that is not meaningful to the child and his or her life?’ Like [John] Dewey and Lewis, Terri fully embraced the idea that schools should be places where children live their lives, not just simply prepare for the future.”

Provenzo’s multifaceted career is difficult to summarize in a few words. In the education field, you might describe him as a professional iconoclast.

“In my field in general, we are sort of the people who put the whole educational picture in context, and we are almost by definition critics of the school system and universities. That makes us a little unpopular.” His career as an educator, researcher, experimenter, author, and artist has been all of a piece with the start he got at Park.



BIO

YEARS AT PARK: 1962–1968

ACTIVITIES: Theater, Model United Nations, ceramics, Literary Magazine

COLLEGE: University of Rochester, BA; Washington University, Masters, Ph.D.

CAREER: Professor, University of Miami School of Education 1976–present

HOBBIES: Stamp collecting, sculpture (assemblage and collage)



Faculty Profile

DR. MARGARET DIAMOND

2007 – Present

Dr. Margaret Diamond does not spend much time worrying about what Robert Frost called the road not taken. That is because an early detour in her career path has made all the difference.

Diamond is a science teacher at Park School, instructing 7th, 11th, and 12th grade classes. A teaching career was not the original plan, however, when Diamond was educated at the University of Rochester and the College of Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse University. Diamond worked as a research technician in a laboratory for a few years, and then decided to get a PhD in molecular biology. She pursued that with course work and research at Roswell Park Cancer Institute in Buffalo.

Scientists hope for an “aha!” moment when doing their work. One of those moments told Diamond that she wasn’t entirely happy with her career choice.

“I really enjoyed doing laboratory work, I enjoyed the process,” she said. “Doing science and research is really getting pieces of a puzzle and putting them together. And I like doing puzzles. But at some point it became not the right thing for me any longer, and I made a change.”

Diamond resigned from her laboratory job and stayed at home for a few years while her two daughters were very young. Then a new career idea dawned on her.

“I had done some teaching as an undergraduate and as a graduate student. It was something I had always enjoyed doing because I enjoyed helping kids. ... I knew that I would prefer teaching on a middle school/high school level over the college level because you get to interact more with your students. So I went back to school and got my teaching certification for biology and earth science, which are the two areas that I love the most.”

Diamond spent five years teaching at a Catholic high school, then worked as a long-term substitute at a public middle school in the Northtowns. She came to work at Park School in the fall of 2007.

“The thing that I enjoy the most about Park is the freedom that we are given as teachers to be creative and develop curriculum.

Teaching in a public school and teaching the Regents curriculum is fine. I have no problem with the Regents curriculum, it’s a perfectly good curriculum, but you are teaching to a test that someone else made up. And that’s a difficult thing to do.

“I really do enjoy not being in that particular situation and being able to be creative and come up with ideas and implement them and see how they work. And this campus is beautiful and there are so many things you can do. You can be outdoors and do science out here and show kids examples of what it is you’re trying to teach them in class. It’s just a wonderful place to be.”

Her seventh grade class this past year was Life Science. In the Upper School, Diamond taught forensics and marine biology. She said she enjoys watching the development of her students when she sees them progress from seventh grade into Upper School juniors and seniors.

“I just like interacting with kids. They’re a lot of fun and they are excited about just about anything you do with them.”

Diamond’s husband, Jacob Schachtner, works as an engineer at Fisher Price-Mattel. The Diamonds have a 20-year-old daughter, Emilie, who is a junior at Ohio Wesleyan University, and a 17-year-old daughter, Jackie, a junior at Williamsville East High School who is beginning the college search process.

An anecdote about a former student of hers finding her way in college illustrates part of what Diamond finds rewarding about teaching.

“There was a girl who took AP Biology from me and she thought she was going to go into engineering,” Diamond recalls. “But she did really well in AP Biology and she ended up doing really well on the exam. When she came back from college in the first year, she told me what a difference her experience at Park had made for her college experience. She told me she was going to change her major, and instead of going into engineering, she was going to be a biology major. So she found out that this is who she really was.”

Diamond says the freedom that students experience at Park seems to make them more invested in their education.

“When it’s your choice, when it’s your responsibility, maybe you put more of an investment into it,” she said. “They have enough rope to hang themselves, to pull themselves up, or anything in between.”

Diamond says she is “a naturalist at heart. That’s the main reason I went to CES&F for a Master’s degree. However, there were not many jobs available in that field at the time (and probably still), so I altered my path. I feel like I’ve come full circle now. I can use my knowledge of biology to help teach kids and connect them to the outdoors, which I love. We can’t separate ourselves from the natural world—we’re part of it.”

BIO

YEARS AT PARK: 2007–Present

COLLEGE: University of Rochester, BA; Syracuse University College of Environmental Science and Forestry, MA; University at Buffalo, PhD

TEACHES: 7th grade Life Science, Upper School Forensics, Marine Biology

HOBBIES: Fostering animals for the SPCA, gardening, bird watching, reading cooking



Alumni Profile

JACK MACKENZIE

Class of 1948

John P. “Jack” MacKenzie calls his introduction to Park School in 1943 “inauspicious.” He was quite happy attending School 56 on Delavan Avenue in Buffalo, but circumstances changed for his family after his father passed away.

“My resourceful mother had converted my father’s slim death benefits into a discounted tuition for my older sister Bonnie’s senior year,” MacKenzie recalls. “My brother Warren, entering seventh grade, and I, eighth grade, were thrown into the deal on full scholarships.”

The eighth grader soon came to love his new school. “Once I got to Park it was so engaging, and the kids were so welcoming. I was very conscious that we were ... lower middle class economically. ... That wasn’t mentioned. The people were all full of this spirit of the school.”

After that year, MacKenzie changed schools again. His mother moved the family to Connecticut. He became homesick for Park, and in the summer after sophomore year he took a train back to Buffalo for a visit. M. Adolphus Cheek, the head of school, encouraged him to think about coming back to Park. Mr. Cheek sounded confident that he would be able to set up Jack with the same tuition scholarship he had enjoyed previously.

MacKenzie returned to Connecticut and discussed the idea with his mother for “several days and nights.” She relented, “heroically, under the circumstances,” and he packed his knapsack and made the first of many hitchhiking trips to Buffalo.

“I arrived downtown and called Dolph Cheek from a hotel. He said, ‘You didn’t get my telegram?’”

Mr. Cheek had sent word that he was unable to obtain the scholarship. Had MacKenzie received the telegram before he left home, his life might have unfolded quite differently. But here he was.

The head of school arranged for some parents and trustees to “pass the hat,” and they came up with an impromptu scholarship fund, keeping Jack at Park.

“Dolph Cheek was at the core of my love for Park. He had great belief in young people and their self-government. He drew an amazing faculty, who made financial sacrifices. Among the especially influential

for me were Elizabeth Young (8th grade), Jeannette Cheek (history), Helga Doblin (music and languages), Tommy Van Arsdale (English), Lee Maggiore (Latin) and Herb Mols, who shared Dolph’s team play values.”

Mr. Cheek guided MacKenzie to Amherst College, where he graduated with honors in American Studies.

At Amherst another fateful day came when the College sponsored an alumni panel discussion about careers. MacKenzie was particularly impressed by one of the panelists, Alfred Friendly, then a star reporter, later managing editor of the *Washington Post*. Friendly was also impressed by MacKenzie and the questions he asked that day, which MacKenzie said were persistent to the point of being bothersome. Friendly considered that a journalistic asset and told Jack to look him up if he ever got to Washington.

The day after graduation, MacKenzie hitchhiked to Washington, where Friendly put in a good word with the city editor, who hired him as a copy boy. In the fall, MacKenzie left for the Navy, serving three years as an officer on a destroyer escort. In 1956 he came back to the newspaper—still a copy boy—and worked up the ranks. In 1959 he married Amanda Fisk, Park ’53, whose father Bradley Fisk “I always thought had been one of the hat-passers, though I don’t recall asking him.” They had three “above average” children, and divorced in 1977.

In 1964 the *Post* sent MacKenzie to Harvard Law School for a year and assigned him to the Supreme Court beat. He was witness to rulings over the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, the Miranda rights case, the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate tapes. After a decade on that “great beat,” MacKenzie moved to New York, where he eventually became an editorial writer at the *New York Times*, a job he held for 20 years.

MacKenzie is retired and living in an apartment in Long Island City, on the East River with a view of mid-Manhattan. He is a member of Park’s Board of Visitors, and is a regular attendee at school reunions. He and some other members of the Class of ’48 decided “a number of reunions ago” to honor Mr. Cheek’s memory by establishing a M. Adolphus and Jeannette Cheek Scholarship at Park School. “The late Tom Whitehouse was a major driver” of the fund, MacKenzie said.

MacKenzie said Dolph Cheek and his wife, Jeannette, were inspirational to many Park students.

“She seemed to challenge the community’s view of the modern woman, though all she did was be professional and teach brilliantly. Dolph challenged the community—he was outspoken about loyalty purges and the internment of Japanese Americans,” MacKenzie recalled. “He hired a Japanese-American family to tend the grounds [at Park],” which MacKenzie called a gutsy move.

“Dolph, for me,” MacKenzie said, “was the special embodiment of the need to succeed with achievement, not personality.”





Alumni Profile

A Profile of **SUSAN KATZEV** Class of 1958

In the 1950s, Susan Womer Katzev's family left the St. Louis area to move to the small Western Pennsylvania town of St. Mary's. Susan enrolled at the local high school, but her parents were not sure it was right for her.

"I was getting A's in science class," she recalls. "My father was a physicist and he knew I wasn't an A student." That, and the fact that Susan was dating a football player, did not go over well in the Womer household. They transferred their daughter to an all-girls school in Pennsylvania, but that was overkill since she soon started standing up whenever they entered a room; eventually, they learned of a private school some 135 miles away, in Snyder, NY. They brought Susan up for an interview at Park School, where she enrolled for 10th grade, ultimately graduating in 1958.

To enable their daughter to attend Park, Susan's mother moved to Snyder and rented an apartment. Susan's father, who worked for a carbon and graphite company in St. Mary's, came to visit on weekends.

"It was a sacrifice I have always been so grateful for," Katzev said, "because Park was really the highlight of my educational experience by far."

Education and learning became lifelong pursuits for Katzev, who is now retired and living in Maine. Upon graduation, Katzev was admitted to Swarthmore College. She deferred her admission in order to explore her artistic talents at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, then enrolled at Swarthmore for four years.

During her sophomore year, Katzev got what she calls "a lucky break." A Swarthmore professor had heard a talk by a young man who was pioneering underwater archeology in the Mediterranean. He was looking for talented people to work for him, including artists. The professor suggested Katzev apply.

The young man, George Bass, hired Katzev as an artist-draftsman. Bass, who is known as the father of underwater archeology, employed her for several summers, then hired her as a full time secretary/assistant. While working on a project in Bodrum, Turkey, she met Michael Katzev, who became her husband in 1966. The Katzevs, along with Bass, continued their undersea expeditions in the Mediterranean.

BIO

YEARS AT PARK: 1955–1958

ACTIVITIES: Student Council, Girls' Discussion Club, Singing Group, Art Club, Literary Club, Spark Art Board, hockey, basketball, softball

COLLEGE: School Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; Swarthmore College

CAREER: Underwater archaeologist

HOBBIES: Sculpture and fine art, working on a book about her work with the Kyrenia Ship

In 1967, Michael Katzev was giving a talk about underwater archeology at the U.S. Embassy on Cyprus. A U.S. Marine there told the Katzevs about a man in the town of Kyrenia, who had discovered a shipwreck that they might find interesting. The Katzevs met the man, Andreas Cariolou, who took them to the wreck site, near Kyrenia. They dove ninety feet and saw the tombstone of a Greek merchant ship from the 4th century BC.

"To our eyes it was the most beautiful sight that we had ever seen under water," Katzev recalls. "It was just a pristine mound of amphoras, about 80 of them showing on the surface."

Michael Katzev, who was teaching at Oberlin College, mounted a team of more than 50 people to begin excavation.

"There was no alternative but to go full speed ahead," Katzev said. "This was to be my husband's new dissertation project. That was the start of the journey that has enveloped the rest of my life. It certainly was the focus of my husband's professional life too."

The Kyrenia Ship was very well-preserved, considering the number of years it spent under the Mediterranean. The excavators salvaged some 6,000 separate pieces of the Hellenistic ship. Then there was the matter of, in Katzev's words, figuring out how to put Humpty Dumpty together again.

When the Katzevs were traveling back in the U.S., a man from Pennsylvania named Richard Steffy came to hear a talk by Michael Katzev. The Katzevs went out for a drink with him afterward and realized they had just met the right man to reassemble the ship. Steffy, an electrical contractor, left his business behind in Lancaster, PA, and moved to Cyprus to work on the project. A just-released book, *The Man Who Thought Like a Ship*, tells his story.

Michael Katzev chronicled the salvaging of the Kyrenia Ship several times in National Geographic, and in a film titled *With Captain, Sailors Three*. It took about five years for the ship to be reassembled. In the 1980s, a replica was built, called Kyrenia II, which today stands in a museum in Cyprus.

The Katzevs bought a house near Kyrenia, intending to stay there for life, but political unrest made that unwise, so they moved to Greece, continuing their research work there. They later returned to the States, eventually settling on the island of Southport, ME, where they built a house overlooking the sea. Michael Katzev died in the house of a stroke on September 8, 2001.

Katzev lives in their home, pursuing her love of sculpture and fine art, and helping put together a written chronicle of their life's work with the Kyrenia Ship.

Katzev said that she thinks a lot about the men who sailed the ancient merchantman the day she sank in 294 BC. "Maybe that's part of my Park School upbringing," she said. "We used to do a lot of things with our hands. This has stuck with me, I think because I want to know people lived on this ship and how they made things. Park trained us to be practical!"

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SUSAN KATZEV *CONTINUED*

In the 2010 edition of the *Park Pioneer*, a piece titled “The Maine Six” told the story of Katzev’s group of Park School friends and their lifelong bond, which remains strong today, more than 50 years after graduation. The group still has regular gatherings—a lively 50th Reunion in 2008, a weekend at Susan’s home in Maine in 2010—and is planning their next one for Centennial Weekend, this coming October.

Susan and her friends never imagined during their high school years that their shared Park School experience would be so meaningful, but know now what a tremendous opportunity they were given. In the *Pioneer* article, Susan reflected on her time at Park: “We felt there was nothing we couldn’t accomplish—the way we learned to organize our work, and develop our writing skills. It changed my life and made it much richer.”



Student Profile

SEYCHELLE MIKOFSKY

Class of 2012

Seychelle Mikofsky is one of Park School’s early bloomers. As an 8th grader, she was named in the *Buffalo News* as a 2011–12 first-team, all-conference basketball player in the Independent Athletic Conference.

Seychelle is also on a fast track in academics. This past year she took a 10th-grade level geometry course, holding her own in a room full of Upper School students.

“Math is probably my favorite class,” said Seychelle, who lives with her parents and two younger brothers in Snyder. “I really enjoy being challenged and taking this higher-level math course.”

Since coming to Park in third grader in 2006, Seychelle has basically hit the ground running.

“The first thing I think I noticed was that teaching was presented very differently at Park,” she said. “We didn’t sit and read out of a textbook. It’s a lot of hands-on education.

“The school that I came from there were 40 kids in each class. There wasn’t very much student to teacher interaction, there wasn’t learning at a personal level.”

BIO

YEARS AT PARK: 2006–Present

ACTIVITIES: Varsity basketball, modified lacrosse, maintaining Stone Hall garden, Green Team, Middle School Student Government

HOBBIES: Basketball, reading, being outdoors

Seychelle’s experience at Park at almost every level demonstrates the advantages many students enjoy in a more intimate, more personal learning environment. As early as sixth grade, she was accelerated to seventh grade math along with a few other students. After Seychelle successfully completed eighth grade math the following year, Math Department Head Tammy Giancola suggested that the “fit” between Seychelle’s abilities and the math curriculum could be improved by moving her into 10th grade honors geometry this year. She’s maintained an A average in the class.

As a fifth grader, Seychelle expressed interest in ecological initiatives at Park. Working with science teacher Glen Herman, Seychelle helped to maintain the large garden Herman established on the west side of Stone Hall. Over the summer, Seychelle watered plants ranging from giant Sunzilla sunflowers to corn, strawberries, basil, tomatoes, and beans. She kept a log of the garden as well, noting evidence of deer snacking, insect invasion, and recording plant growth. Park’s Pre-K to Grade 12 format has proved to be a distinct advantage to Seychelle in the athletic arena as well.

Seychelle loves getting the chance to play her favorite sport—basketball—wearing a Park uniform. She began last season practicing with the girls varsity team, while playing for the modified team. About a quarter of the way into the season, she was brought up to play varsity.

“It was a whole different world than the basketball I had been playing before. I was challenged every day in practice. All of my teammates were really receptive to having an 8th grader on the team. We’re all friends. I think it was one of the best decisions I’ve made. I really enjoyed the challenge and I think it put me at a higher level when I was playing.”

Seychelle recently had the chance to visit with WNBA player Maya Moore, whom she met at a Minnesota Lynx game in Minneapolis. Moore, who was a star for the University of Connecticut, is Seychelle’s third cousin. Seychelle described meeting her famous cousin as inspirational.

Seychelle also took on the challenge of playing for the modified girls lacrosse team, which just completed its first-ever season.

Away from the sports field, she’s an active member of Park’s Green Team, an environmental club, and is president of the Middle School Student Government.

“I’m the only middle school representative on the Green Team. So it’s great to be able to inform the middle schoolers, like to say at morning meeting, ‘Remember it’s tray-less lunch week this week, so think about not taking your tray.’”

Seychelle’s voice bubbles with enthusiasm, whether she’s describing a great day on the basketball court, or just the joy of going to school.

“I always say that I love school, but that’s only really happened since I came to Park,” she said. “At the school I went to before, it was like ‘Mom, I really don’t want to go to school today.’ But now, every morning I wake up and I can’t wait to go. I love being there.”



Alumni Profile

SARAH GIANCOLA

Class of 2008

If Sarah Giancola's collegiate career as a student-athlete could be summarized in a book title, a good choice would be Dr. Seuss's *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*

The sport of rowing has taken Sarah to competitions all across the United States. Her education at Park School and Northeastern University have made her a citizen of the world.

Sarah just completed her fourth year at Northeastern. She is enrolled in a five-year program at the Boston school, in the College of Arts and Sciences, working toward a degree in international affairs and cultural anthropology with a minor in Middle Eastern studies.

"My academic world is totally opposite of my rowing world; the people are so different," Giancola said.

"We have a co-op system, an internship program, at Northeastern. My first co-op was translating for Iraqi refugees coming into this country.

"I got to know so many people who otherwise I wouldn't have gotten to meet. They are either people who helped the American military [in Iraq] in some way or they're just civilians who wanted to come over to America. A lot of them are doctors, engineers, people who didn't think it was safe at home and just wanted to leave. I helped them get basic housing, food, and to find schools. I really enjoyed it and am broadening my knowledge of Middle Eastern culture."

Giancola was captain of her rowing team this year. On April 29 the squad won its second consecutive Colonial Athletic Association championship—and third in four years. The head coach, Joe Wilhelm, was named the CAA Coach of the Year for the second straight year.

"Last year I was in an [eight-person boat] that came in second in the Eastern Sprints. This year our varsity eight came in second in the Eastern Sprints again, so that was two years in a row. It's kind of the East Coast championship. And my being captain was a big honor."

Giancola has used up her four years of college athletic eligibility, so she thought she would be done with the rigors of rowing for awhile. It didn't turn out that way. In May, USRowing invited Sarah to try

out for the Lightweight Women's Under 23 National Team. She began tryouts in early June and advanced through the U.S. trials, earning a spot on the team that represented the U.S. in the 2012 Rowing Under 23 Championships, held July 11–15 in Trakai, Lithuania. Their boat, the lightweight women's quadruple sculls, finished fourth in the championships, narrowly missing out on a medal. One of her teammates on the boat was a University at Buffalo graduate, Cornelia Willis of Clarence. The other boat members were Samantha Brecht (Flourtown, PA.) and Carolina Paine (Newport Beach, CA.). Sarah said that just trying out for a spot on the national team was an honor she was not expecting. "One of the coaches from the University of Virginia—they are the number-one team in the country—she saw me rowing, talked to my coach," and recommended that Sarah try out. "I like training and like working out, so it's worth it," she said. "Especially with the friends you make, you go through something that's pretty time-intensive, pretty taxing overall, and the people you meet and become friends with tend to be pretty good friends. It's been a long run, but it's been really fun."

Sarah's long run in crew began at Buffalo's West Side Rowing Club. Her academic passions were first kindled at Park School, where her mom, Tammy Giancola, is head of the math department.

"I felt more than prepared when I got to college," Sarah said. "The small class sizes at Park meant you got to know your teachers. You could ask anyone if you needed help. When I got to Northeastern I wasn't afraid to ask for help. I developed a lot of close relationships with professors because of my Park experience."

In addition to her mom, Sarah mentioned Park language teacher Beth Anne Jeswald as being particularly influential in her life.

"She really helped me with my senior thesis. She was one of the reasons I have such an interest in languages. And she was just really there for you if you had any problems outside of school and just wanted someone to talk to.

"Then it was Ms. [Kerry] Reynolds and Mr. [Jeremy] Besch. I had Mr. Besch for freshman English. With Ms. Reynolds I had a course called 'In Search of the Good Life.' I learned a lot in that class. She really helped me to think for myself, helped me to question people's values and things. I learned a lot from those three teachers, but all of my teachers were really good."

BIO

YEARS AT PARK: 2001–2008

ACTIVITIES: Orchestra, Upper School Student Government, rowing

COLLEGE: Northeastern University

HOBBIES: Foreign languages (Arabic, Spanish, and French, and will be starting Italian in the fall), cooking

