

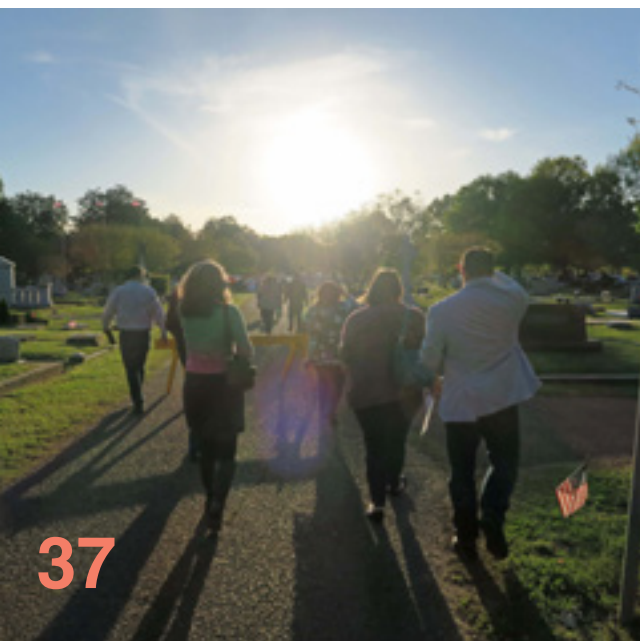
# THE CURRENT

AN ALUMNI PUBLICATION OF THE MISSISSIPPI SCHOOL FOR MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE FOUNDATION DEC. 2016 ISSUE 3





2



37



10



21

VILLAR

## MAKING WAVES

- 10** From Lab Reports to Book Covers  
A Profile of Jaime Johnson (c/o 2006)
- 19** Ysolde Aquino Carreon (c/o 2012) Q&A
- 21** Seaman to Admiral by 2032, A Profile of  
LCDR Dsmond Walker (c/o 1996)
- 25** Doc Shalin Patel (c/o 1999)

## CURRENT FEATURES

- 2** Our Foundation Then & Now
- 5** Like Father, Like Son  
Two Generations of MSMS Alumni
- 15** Dr. Bill Odom, Value Beyond Measure
- 29** Memory
- 31** School Update
- 37** Alumni Weekend 2016



Subscriptions, Inquiries & Address Changes:

THE CURRENT  
1100 College Street, MUW-190  
Columbus, MS 39701  
info@msmsfoundation.com

A PUBLICATION OF  
THE MSMS FOUNDATION

### EXECUTIVE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Ms. Cindy Henderson, President  
cjhenderson@gmail.com
- Mr. Chad F. Edmonson, Vice President  
cedmonson@hotmail.com
- Mr. Ryder Taff, Secretary  
jrtaff@gmail.com
- Mr. John Davis, Treasurer  
john.davis@cadencebank.com
- Dr. Germain McConnell,  
Executive Director of MSMS  
gmccConnell@themsms.org
- Mr. Michael Goggans, Past President  
michael@gogganslaw.com

### BOARD MEMBERS

- Mr. Jeremy Abernathy
- Mr. Dillon Allen
- Mr. Eric Atchison
- Ms. Leslie Waites, PLUS President
- Mr. Jack L. Carter
- Mr. Jason Christiansen
- Ms. Mattie Clay
- Mr. Nathaniel Clay
- Ms. Andrea Collins
- Mr. Jim Davidson
- Ms. Rita Dollar, PLUS Treasurer
- Mr. Shannon Eubanks
- Dr. Murrell Godfrey, MSMS Advisory  
Board President
- Dr. Heather Hanna, Director for School  
Advancement - MSMS
- Mr. Orlando Hill
- Mr. Deyo Johnson
- Ms. Crystal L. Lauderdale
- Mr. Owen McGuire
- Ms. Simran (Simi) Mittal
- Ms. Kim Padeletti, MSMSAA President
- Dr. Thomas Richardson
- Dr. Jennifer Sloan Ziegler



Dear Reader,

It has been two years since I embarked on this amazing and challenging journey as the director of operations for the MSMS Foundation. I have learned many great things about MSMS. I have witnessed the amazing life altering process of new and eager students accepting the challenge to leave behind everything that is familiar and secure, to receive a unique experience and opportunity for excellence. I have watched them grow more confident in their own abilities with each passing month. I have also watched what I believe to be life-long friendships form right before my eyes. I like to think I have

the unique opportunity to fast forward into the future lives of these brilliant individuals through meeting some of the amazing MSMS alumni, who have shared memories quite similar to the ones I am now witnessing.

The unique and fascinating culture of MSMS has helped me to understand just how important it is for everyone from students, alumni, parents, faculty and staff and all other supporters, to be able to continue the experience no matter where life leads them. The Foundation is committed to making sure everyone is able to reach out and lend their support as volunteers, mentors, ambassadors and life-long partners. We want to make sure that everyone who understands and values the opportunities offered by MSMS is able to stay updated and informed, connect with former classmates and collaborate on new ideas and innovations that will help promote the future growth and development of the Foundation, so that others will come to understand as well.

I would like to thank everyone who invested time and effort into helping produce this 3rd issue of *The Current*. Special thanks to all writers, photographers, editors, interview and article participants and everyone who contributed time and collaborated on this project. Also a special thanks to Markus Maguire for providing the cover photo. Again, I am truly grateful for the opportunity to become part of the MSMS family. I truly value the challenges and experiences that the school provides to these young, bright individuals. It is an honor to take part in helping to grow the Foundation. With your support, together we will help ensure that more students will have the opportunity to accept the challenge that is MSMS.

Sincerely,

Kassie Brooks

# OUR FOUNDATION *then to now*

## Chronology

**2/22/1989 –**

First MSMS Foundation Board Meeting – Board included George Bryan, Frank Leigh, Merlinda Mays, John O’Neal, Jack Reed, Governor Bill Allain, Jim Campbell, Doyce Deas, J. Mac Holladay, Donald Lutken, Mike Sturdivant and Governor William Winter.

**9/25/1996 –**

The MSMS Foundation Board was reinvigorated.

**4/23/2008 –**

HB 513 was signed into law requiring MSMS students to pay \$500 per semester for room and board

**9/29/2014 –**

MSMS Director of Operations, Kassie Brooks begins

**6/28/1989 –**

The MSMS Foundation’s Articles of Incorporation were filed with the Mississippi Secretary of State

**12/10/1990 –**

The MSMS Foundation was recognized by the IRS as a 501c3 nonprofit.

**8/20/1998 –**

The Foundation held assets of \$122,660.33

**12/31/2008 –**

The Foundation held assets of \$269,631

**12/31/2015 –**

The Foundation held assets of \$833,217



My first contact with the MSMS Foundation was as a student in the spring of my junior year. The Foundation assisted me by purchasing equipment I needed for a research project. It was only a few hundred dollars, but like many of the students the Foundation assists, it meant a lot to me at the time. I joined the Foundation’s Board in 2009 following passage of *HB 513*. While transparency about the Foundation has increased, I know that many supporters of MSMS still know very little about the Foundation and its history. I hope this article will shed more light on the Foundation’s past and present.

The Foundation was initially founded in February of 1989 by a small group of individuals who were passionate about education and improving opportunities for all Mississippians.

By Cindy Henderson, MSMS Foundation President, (c/o 1995)

### FORMATION:

The initial MSMS Foundation Board came from a variety of backgrounds including education, economic development and business.

That first Board included an impressive group of successful and forward thinking individuals like Frank Leigh, a noted Columbus businessman who developed Leigh Mall and believed in ensuring the availability of a quality education in Mississippi. Jack Reed was a Tupelo businessman who owned Reed's department store, a family business since 1905. Reed worked for racial fairness in Mississippi and believed in the benefit of public education. Mike Sturdivant was a leader in state agriculture and was described by Governor William Winter as "totally dedicated to improving life for everyone in Mississippi." Doyce Deas was a graduate of the Mississippi College for Women, and her family started and operated Hancock Textile Company. She made it her mission to make Mississippi the best place it could be. Those are just a few of the initial Board members.

As you can imagine, that group knew that the creation of MSMS was an important step in creating educational opportunities in Mississippi, but the next step was to ensure MSMS would have additional support outside of state funding. They established the original charter and bylaws of the MSMS Foundation and envisioned campaigns to raise funds to endow the Foundation.

### RESURGENCE:

By 1996, the initial Board had drifted apart and MSMS Executive Director

Mike Neyman set about reinvigorating the Board. New members, including Wayne Bryan, were added to the remaining members.

From 1999 to 2008, the Foundation saw new energy and interest in fund raising and activities that supported MSMS and the MSMS Family. Neyman stated that he "saw the MSMS Foundation as a key component to the future success of the school. Due to the reality that MSMS was funded publicly yearly by legislative act, it was essential to create a funding stream to ensure those 'extras' that were essential to the school's vision and, secondly, to create an important public information and marketing vehicle."

In the resurgence years, the focus was to implement marketing and exposure initiative for MSMS and to grow the assets of the Foundation. While those overall objectives were kept in mind, the Foundation still completed a number of projects to assist MSMS students and support the school's mission to enhance the future of Mississippi in the global society by meeting the needs of gifted and talented students through innovative learning experiences and leadership development.

Those projects included college scholarships, summer camps for younger students, various pieces of science equipment, trips to CERN for MSMS students and sponsorship of the MSMS Science Carnival. Funds and items were also provided directly to students from coats, to calculators, to equipment for research experiments, to emergencies. The Foundation managed to do good things for MSMS and the students while growing.

### ONWARD AND UPWARD:

In 2008, *HB 513* required MSMS to charge students a \$500 room and board fee per semester, or \$1,000 per school year. Many alumni and friends of MSMS were upset and concerned about how this change would affect potential MSMS students and recruitment, especially from poorer regions of the state. This event led to the current resurgence of the Board. The Board was galvanized to increase fundraising to ensure no student was turned away from MSMS due to financial hardship. From 2008 to 2014, the MSMS Foundation grew annual donations more than 900% from \$44,682 to \$402,402.

### FUTURE:

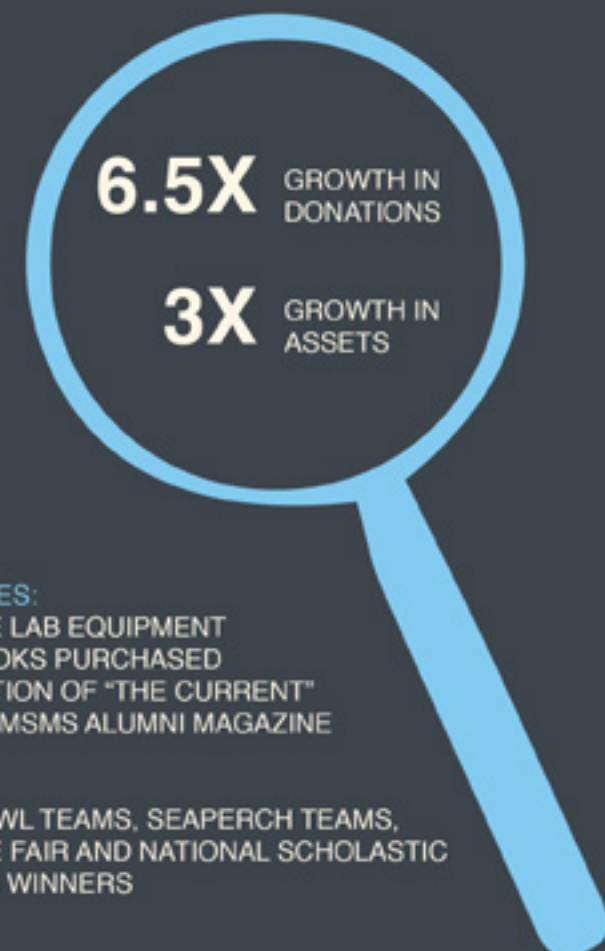
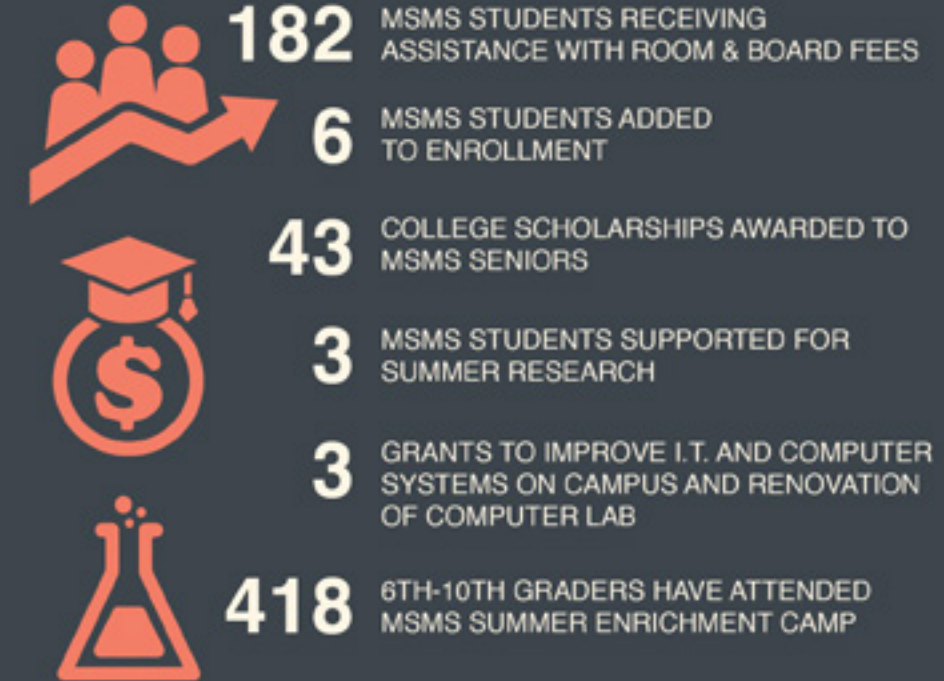
I'm proud that the MSMS Foundation Board has been able to continue to complete meaningful projects to increase the quality of education at MSMS as well as increasing the number of seats available at MSMS as the stagnant MSMS budget has forced other cuts. An important aspect of the Foundation's growth has been the need to grow the Foundation's donor base and assets to a point to support full-time staff to ensure daily operational needs are addressed and assist in larger-scale fundraising and outreach. That we've managed to do both of these things and grow is a huge achievement that would never have been possible without the support of our incredible donors and a great Board.

To be honest, as a Class of 1995 alum, being on campus makes me a little sad. When I arrived on campus in 1993, MSMS was the state leader in technology and

educational opportunities. While my homeschool still taught typing and the internet wasn't going to be available there for years, MSMS had access to the internet, computers, and real labs. MSMS's faculty and administration continue to shine and provide amazing opportunities, but the technology today is not on par with the best schools in Mississippi. The faculty continues to push the envelope with curriculum, but new, innovative programs and curriculum require appropriate equipment, facilities, and faculty that aren't in the budget. Some labs have been renovated since the school opened, but many of the other rooms and buildings look almost identical to the early 1990s because they haven't been updated. That's great for nostalgia but the facilities – from the dorms to the labs – are no longer modern and up to date.

The MSMS Foundation's next step is finalizing a strategic plan in 2016 with milestones to help guide our future growth and to ensure our ability to support MSMS and its students for decades to come. Unfortunately, the budget concerns on the state level seem unlikely to change for MSMS in the foreseeable future. As we look at the future of the Foundation and MSMS, we're looking to carve the best path forward to ensure this amazing "Opportunity for Excellence" is available for students indefinitely and to help move the school back to being a state and national leader in technology, facilities, and curriculum. We have the students and the faculty, we just need to make sure the infrastructure is there to support them.

# 2009-2016 Impact



**MULTIPLES:**  
SCIENCE LAB EQUIPMENT  
TEXTBOOKS PURCHASED  
3RD EDITION OF "THE CURRENT"  
ANNUAL MSMS ALUMNI MAGAZINE

**TRIPS:**  
QUIZ BOWL TEAMS, SEAPERCH TEAMS,  
SCIENCE FAIR AND NATIONAL SCHOLASTIC  
WRITING WINNERS

# LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

## TWO GENERATIONS OF MSMS ALUMNI



## Next Generation: A Father and Son Reflect on their MSMS Experiences

By Crystal Lauderdale  
(c/o 2000)

It's been nearly 25 years since the class of 1992 became the third cohort to graduate from the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science. Jonathan Barlow, 42, was among them. This past spring, Barlow watched his son, Nathan, 17, cross the stage and become one of MSMS' newest alumni.

"The foresight of the people who started MSMS is now having a second generation of effects for the good of Mississippians," wrote Jonathan in an email interview.

Originally from Picayune, Jonathan, a software architect, mobile developer and project manager for government software initiatives, now lives in Starkville with his family. He is the Associate Director

for Architecture and Development at the National Strategic Planning and Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) at Mississippi State University. After graduating from MSMS, he double-majored in philosophy and political science at



Mississippi State and went on to obtain a Master's of Divinity from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, and a Ph.D. in Historical Theology from Saint Louis University.

"For most of Nathan's life we lived in St. Louis," said Jonathan, who returned to Mississippi with his family when he was offered his current position. "It took me about two minutes to realize, once I was a Mississippian again, that Nathan should consider MSMS."

Jonathan and Nathan, who began his freshman year at Columbia University in New York this fall, together share a unique perspective of MSMS, experiencing the school as students in both its earliest years and its most recent. Jonathan now knows the school from a parent's perspective as well.

*In an interview conducted via email, they share their MSMS memories and hopes for the school's future.*

**What was the biggest reason you decided to apply to and attend MSMS?**

**JB (c/o '92):** I happened to see the documentary "American Dream at Groton" on PBS in about 1990 ... about the world of elite, private boarding schools in the northeast. I wanted the kind of educational opportunity that I saw in the film. I went to the library ... and obtained addresses for all those schools and wrote to them. The packets I received were all for very expensive schools half a world away and it seemed pretty impossible. My mother then spotted the advertisement for MSMS in the Clarion Ledger and I couldn't believe there was such a great opportunity right here in my home state.

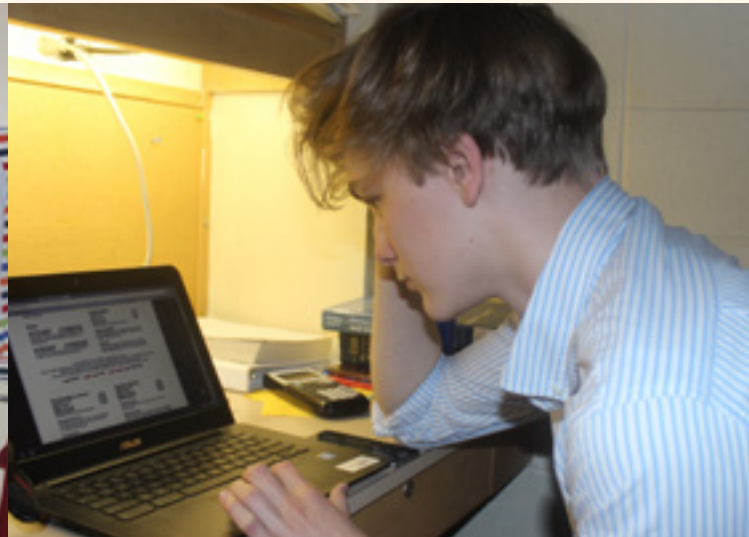
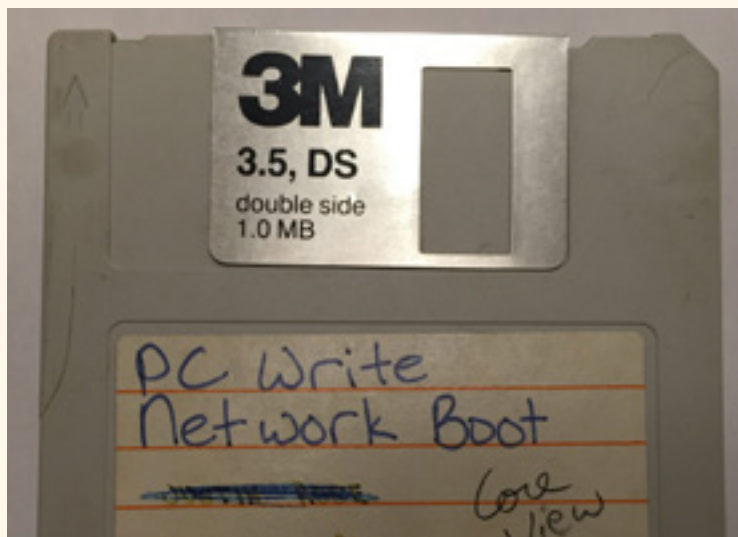
**NB (c/o '16):** I really wanted to go to a school where my teachers didn't give me word searches as classwork. I wanted a challenge. Also, the prospect of being around kids like me who were also really passionate about substantive things sealed the deal.

**What do you think sets MSMS apart the most from other high schools?**

**JB (c/o '92):** When I went there I felt trusted. The teachers treated us more like responsible learners and not like children. The teachers were also really experts in their subject areas and that was a great help to us. Finally, the learning community was amazing - the friendships and the learning with peers. I remember one time that my friend Stuart Rubin became interested in the idea of making holograms. The school helped

him get a laser and photographic paper to make it a reality. Also, at the time I attended, MSMS had a computer network and a lot of access to computers - something rare for public high schools in 1990. I learned to program in the C programming language, something I used to create a cool "circuit solver" program for my physics final project. That was the foundation for my whole career, though I didn't know it at the time.

**NB (c/o '16):** ... One thing a lot of people don't think of is how little administrative things get in the way of what matters. At my old school, it seemed like half of the day was dealing with having your ID badge and taking attendance and intercoms. At MSMS, they don't bog you down with that stuff. The teachers, too, seem really focused on learning and what really matters



... Very rarely did something feel extraneous or perfunctory (except for the wellness grade) ...

**(To JB): How has the school changed since you attended?**

**JB (c/o '92):** It seems a little more sheltering. We had a lot of freedom to do pretty much whatever when we signed out on the weekends. Maybe I'm remembering that wrong, but it did seem like Nathan was subject to more rules ... The other big difference is mobile technology and the Internet. I can't imagine what it would be like to be a high school student these days - access to all the learning of humanity, ability to find out any piece of missing information, etc.

**(To JB): In what ways is it the same?**

**JB (c/o '92):** I notice that Nathan and his friends have a lot of inside jokes and that he really enjoyed the camaraderie of the guys in the dorm. That kind of shared experience generates a very particular kind of close friendship. It's also the same in that Nathan's favorite part of the educational aspect was the good teachers.

**(To JB): What were move-in days like from the parents' perspective?**

**JB (c/o '92):** Ha! Well, I'm not accustomed to having teenagers

whom I don't know handling our luggage and clothing. Also, the elevators and facilities were a little more spartan than the dorm I lived in at MSMS.

**Any favorite memories you particularly want to share?**

**JB (c/o '92):** I remember the contest where we dropped eggs and one of my classmates, Karl Raffa, suspended the egg in a saline solution; something completely effective and more elegant than any of the mechanical approaches. I remember making a paper airplane caught by the wind that flew completely over Peyton dorm. I remember going to YMCA Youth Legislature with a huge MSMS contingent and our really dominating the competitive aspects of it. I remember watching Jacob Bara-Scrowonek doing mathematical proofs on napkins in the cafeteria and I remember his kindness in staying up late with me in a bathroom in the boy's dorm to explain some mathematical concept I was having trouble grasping for a test. I remember staying up late talking about the meaning of life with Garret Comeaux, and I remember waking up early to watch a meteor shower with his twin brother Joel Comeaux. I remember singing and playing guitar with Stuart Rubin. I remember hanging out with Mike Chu and Brian Rubin De la Borbolla

(seniors) listening to great music on Mike's beautiful stereo. I remember skateboarding all over downtown Columbus with classmates on a Saturday in the cold weather. I ollied clean over a fire hydrant that I cleared even with my trucks; it was a banner day. I remember dancing awkwardly in a circle with my classmates at dances. I remember the time it snowed and the fun we had. I remember all the laughing and the inside jokes. I remember how we'd all gather between supper and study hours in the lobby of Peyton to watch the *MTV Half-Hour Comedy Hour*. I remember hanging out with the same circle of girls and guys all the time.

**NB (c/o '16):** There are so many great memories, and in truth my two years of MSMS have been kind of ringing in my head lately, now that it's all over. I'm sure time will give me clarity on what memories really stick out. But I have a few that come to mind at the moment. Both years I participated in an international math modeling competition where teams of four have 36 hours to make a mathematical model and write a paper - the perfect competition for MSMS. Especially the first year, I felt like we had kind of an underdog team, but after 36 hours of laughing and being frustrated and even inventing our own terms ("the lag coefficient"), we ended up with a paper that ended up placing really

well internationally. Early in my junior year, a few guys in my class founded "Bagel Club," which met after room check once a week to eat bagels and socialize. I remember that I wanted to get our name out there, so I edited the Wikipedia article for "Bagel" to feature a description of our MSMS Bagel Club along with a dorky picture of all of us in MSMS dress on the steps of Hooper.

**Where did you REALLY go when you signed out to go off campus?**

**JB (c/o '92):** "Mall, movie, eat on 45" was always my standard entry on the sign-out card. About as radical as I'd get was the occasional trip over to Starkville to visit the used CD store and listen to speakers and tube amps at the audiophile stereo store. I always tried to stay on the straight and narrow because I just didn't want to get kicked out; I loved the place.

**NB (c/o '16):** For the most part, I actually did go where I said I was going. Lame, I know.

**Do you think a school like MSMS is important or even essential to the state of Mississippi? If so, why?**

**JB (c/o '92):** Yes; it's really an equalizer - helping kids in Mississippi who have the aptitude to get a world-class education. In my case, it expanded my horizons, making me aware of a world of scholarship and

academic options that I didn't even know existed. There are some bright kids in Mississippi who lack only the opportunity to stretch themselves ... Kids leave MSMS and spread the virtues of Mississippi all over the country [and] world, and many end up working and serving the people of the state who funded this opportunity.

**NB (c/o '16):** I think an option for high school students like MSMS is important. I and a lot of my friends would have been pretty bored—socially and academically—if MSMS weren't what we'd spent the past two years doing. There will always be some students in Mississippi who are mature enough and ready for a challenge, and I hope that they have the type of opportunity that I did.

**Do you think your education or experience at MSMS has helped/ will help you significantly in your life and/or career? If so, how?**

**JB (c/o '92):** Certainly. Just even getting the opportunity to have access to scholarships as an undergraduate allowed me to graduate from college debt-free. And even though I had good scholarships, the C programming language, that I learned at MSMS, allowed me to get a great job as an undergraduate researcher doing work in computer graphics at what was then called the Engineering Research Center at Mississippi State. I also met people from all

over the state with a lot more experience and knowledge than I had about academic options.

**NB (c/o '16):** I think the ways that MSMS taught me to balance everything will make the transition to college easier than it would be otherwise. Also, I'm pretty good at living in dorms now.

**(To NB): If you plan on leaving Mississippi for college, do you think you'll return at any point? Or perhaps I should say, where do you see yourself living and working in 5 years? 10 years?**

**NB (c/o '16):** I think there's a really high chance I'll end up living and working in the South, long term. I would like to come back.

**(To NB): If you have children of your own, would you encourage them to attend MSMS?**

**NB (c/o '16):** I would, definitely. MSMS was exactly what I needed as a junior in high school, and I'm sure my children will hear all the good things I have to say about the school.

**What are your hopes for the future of the school?**

**JB (c/o '92):** I hope that MSMS can eventually build up a good endowment and not have the kind of uncertainty about funding that it seems to have. As great as my



son's experience was at MSMS, I feel like the residence facilities were a little more conducive to community when I was there with Peyton and Fant as the boys' and girls' dorms and being on that more attractive part of the campus. I have so many memories of sitting in the grass in front of Peyton, of hanging out on the porch, and of just being proud of how good that dorm looked when I moved in as a junior ...

**NB (c/o '16):** I think there's a lot of promise in the alumni association.

As the number of alumni expand, maybe MSMS could get a significant endowment going. I'd like to see what MSMS could do with the independence of private money.

***Anything else you would like to share?***

**NB (c/o '16):** A friend and I joked at MSMS that "to peak in high school" is generally not a good thing, but that if MSMS were the peak of our lives then that'd be acceptable. I'd like to say thanks to the faculty and

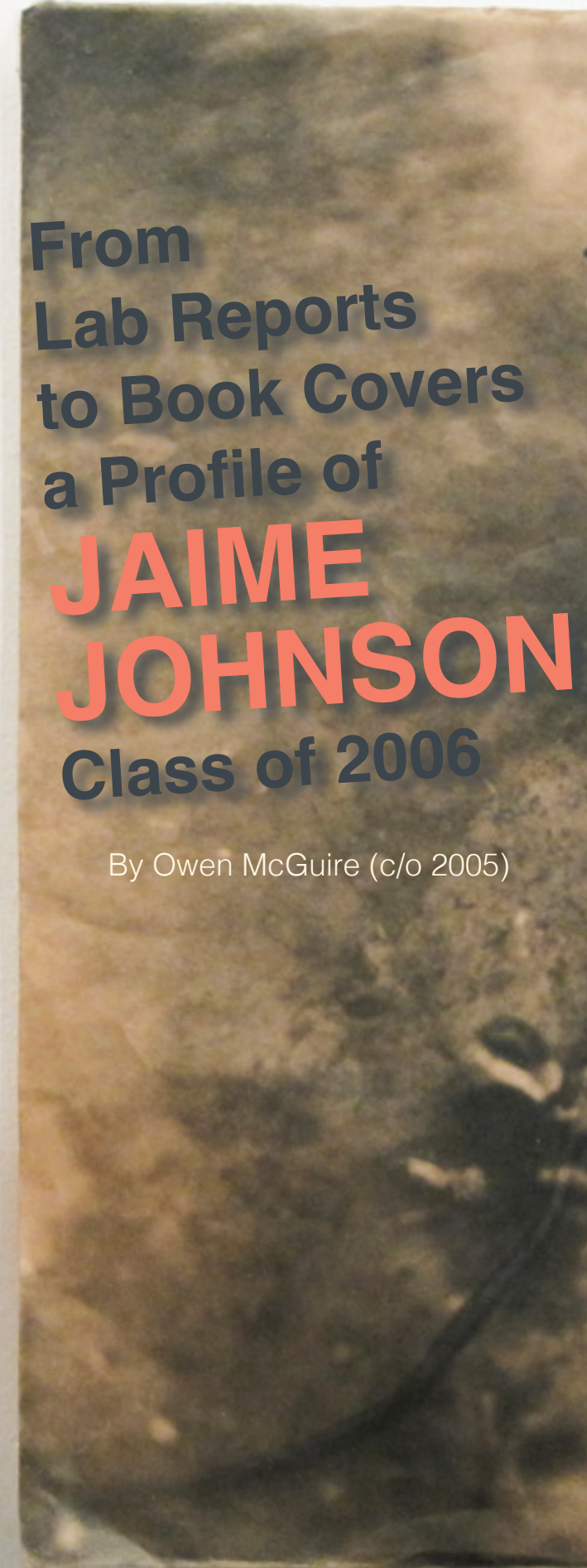
to classmates from all three of my related MSMS classes - a lot of you made impressions on me you never knew you made.

**JB (c/o '92):** One of the most gratifying things about attending MSMS is everything that happens afterward as you watch your classmates go out into the world and do amazing things. I have classmates who design and program medical devices embedded into human bodies ... those who are professors in many different disciplines, who started microbreweries, who work for companies like Oculus and live all around the world. I also get to meet, in my daily work in Mississippi government, other graduates who are here in the state, and there is an instant connection. It's amazing to me that something that represents an increasingly smaller percentage of my life (4.8% - 2 years out of 42 at this point) continues to be such an important aspect of my life ... it now has a second generation of effects, allowing my own son to get access to the kind of educational preparation that has him going to a prestigious college ... And so I just want to say that I'm grateful to two groups especially - the taxpayers of Mississippi who gave me and Nathan this opportunity and that something as bold as starting a new school on a fairly untested model actually happened and has lasted this long. The second group for whom I'm thankful includes the first class of students and the second class (my seniors); I think of them as these kind of pioneers who did something really bold in concert with a new faculty and administration. Really "new" things don't happen that often, especially the creation of institutions, and so I'm grateful to the people who funded the idea and who actually answered the call to get it going.



From  
Lab Reports  
to Book Covers  
a Profile of  
**JAIME  
JOHNSON**  
Class of 2006

By Owen McGuire (c/o 2005)





From Lab Reports to Book Covers

## A Profile of Jaime Johnson, Class of 2006

By Owen McGuire

“Coming to MSMS was my first time ever leaving home,” Jaime said about departing from her hometown of Poplarville. Jaime is a 2006 graduate of MSMS, an achievement that runs in the family. Her twin brother Jeremy was her classmate at the school, and their sister Jenny graduated in 2004.

It was during the two years at MSMS that Jaime discovered her talent for art, specifically photography. At that time, the now-accomplished photographer was armed with a simple point-and-shoot camera. “I used it to document everything around me,” she said.

Jaime acknowledges art teacher Angie Jones as a major influence during her time at school. She also fondly recounted her love and appreciation for English teacher Emma Richardson. A project in Mrs. Richardson’s class helped Jaime use her enthusiasm for visual arts to support her passion for literature.

“Mrs. Richardson asked us to interpret a piece of literature and respond to it however we wanted,” Jaime remembered. “I really enjoyed responding with something visual.”

While courses focusing on art and literature may seem like appropriate sources of inspiration for visual arts, Jaime credits the genesis of her newfound passion to an entirely different department at the school.

“I loved taking photos for lab reports,” she explained, referencing the step of documenting the process and results after a science project. Jaime includes science teachers Dr. Bill Odom and Dr. Gil Katzenstein among her artistic inspirations. “In my classes with Dr. Odom and Dr. Katz my favorite thing to do was put together the reports, the visual stuff.”

At MSMS, Jaime enjoyed the opportunity to do a mentorship at a local animal clinic, which also influenced her artistic touch. “I was fascinated by the X-rays of the animals,” she recounted. “Looking back, I’m not surprised by the presence of animal bones in my work.”

Jaime has always known she wanted to stay in Mississippi. She enrolled at Ole Miss in the fall of 2006 in the art department. Jaime originally intended to pursue graphic design, assuming that the career options might be better. “I never stopped making photographs, but I also did not know

you could do it as a career,” she said. For the first two years of the program, art students work in foundational classes before declaring a focus. These foundations classes are where Jaime discovered her talents. “I was going to drawing class and taking my camera,” she laughed. Jaime declared a focus in imaging arts, and graduated from the art department in 2011.

After leaving Ole Miss, Jaime pursued her Master of Fine Arts degree in photography at Louisiana Tech University. She developed her style over the next three years and graduated with her MFA in 2014. “All the work I’ve made is from that three year time, and most of it was shot in Mississippi,” Jaime said. “I would go back to Poplarville, to my parents house, and take photos in the back yard.” Growing up in the country, spending time in the outdoors, has inspired most of Jaime’s work. Because of this, she says she “thrives in a place like Mississippi.”

Jaime has been busy since finishing the MFA program at Louisiana Tech. She returned to Ole Miss, where she is an adjunct instructor in the art department, teaching the foundations classes. Despite being a self-proclaimed

homebody, Jaime has spent the past three summers teaching high school students at the Maine Media Workshops.

In 2014, Jaime was contacted by a publishing house in Ireland that was interested in using one of her images for a book cover. Her photograph *Spine* is now the cover image of a republished version of the 1870 Austrian novel *Venus in Furs*. “It is really neat to be associated with another work like that,” Jaime said, reaffirming her appreciation for her former art and literature teachers at MSMS. In spring of 2017, her self-portrait *She Rests in Flowers* will be used as the cover of a book of poetry titled *The Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded* by Molly McCully Brown, a current MFA student at Ole Miss.

MSMS was more preparation for life as an artist than just art classes, literature projects, mentorships and lab reports. “People think of art as fun, but it’s also a lot of work and late hours,” Jaime said. “The rigorous academic culture at MSMS helped prepare me for a rigorous art career.”

“Engineers stay up late, but artists do, too,” she laughed.

A collection of Jaime’s work will be featured as part of the *Mississippi Invitational*. The exhibition opens December 2016 at the **Mississippi Museum of Art**. You can see more of Jaime's work at: <http://www.jaimejphotography.com/>





### ARTIST STATEMENT

Aligning with the tradition of Southern Gothic, Jaime Johnson's *Untamed* articulates humankind's capacity to decay as a marker of our identity. Set in the swamps and woods of Mississippi and Louisiana, natural places where one encounters life and death, growth and decay, the series chronicles the intimate relationship of a feral woman and her surrounding nonhuman environment. The woman collects the bones, branches and flora and treads with the animals, both dead and living. Recognizing the deaths of other creatures, this woman observes in death, she, too, will be repurposed and consumed by the earth. Roger Thompson, Associate Professor of Writing and Rhetoric at Stony Brook University, writes of Johnson's photograph *Bone Dress* "the stereotypical southern belle dress is transformed into a pile of bones, a startling (if also darkly humorous) reimagining of the Southern woman."

The cyanotype process shifts focus from potentially colorful landscapes and figures to patterns, textures and the relationships of forms within the images. Tea-staining the prints dulls the blue and adds warmth. Printing on Japanese Kitakata paper, which is prone to ripping, tearing and wrinkling, reflects the deterioration of nature and gives the prints a feeling of fragility. *Untamed* ultimately reflects upon the forms, the impermanence, and the interconnectedness of natural life.

EMAIL:  
artistjaimejohnson@gmail.com

WEBSITE:  
http://www.jaimejphotography.com

INSTAGRAM:  
https://www.instagram.com/darkroomdove/

## MSMS Alumni Association

# UPDATE



*Seriously, you're missing out if your contact information is that old Hotmail account and your parent's address!*

**NOT A MEMBER?** Membership is free, just click 'Join' at [www.msmsaa.org](http://www.msmsaa.org)

Get notices about reunions • Keep up with classmates and friends • advance your career • Expand your network  
Get notices about volunteer service opportunities • Stay up to date on news and happenings at MSMS

## ARE YOU A NERD HERDER?



**We're planning MSMS Alumni events for metro areas of:  
Alabama • Texas • Tennessee • Louisiana • Florida • California**

Nerd Herders help MSMSAA set up alumni events in your area. Including helping locate venues, identifying volunteer service opportunities, and reaching out to local alumni. This is a great opportunity to meet new people, make business connections, welcome 'new' alumni, and catch up with old friends at regional events throughout the year!

**BECOME A NERD HERDER TODAY!** Message: [kim.padeletti@gmail.com](mailto:kim.padeletti@gmail.com)

# DR. BILL ODOM

## VALUE BEYOND MEASURE

By Crystal Lauderdale (c/o 2000)

“Too often our kids are taught about scientific principles rather than doing science; they memorize the parts of speech rather than using them to tell a story.” - Alfie Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve*

It was either spring or fall of 1999.

“I can’t remember in which order I took genetics and ecology,” says Amy Lee (Coleman) Hale, who graduated from the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science in 2000.

Whatever the season, it was time for Dr. Bill Odom’s ecology class. Hale and her classmates were ready in the classroom, but Odom was not. Instead, on his desk was a note and a mysterious gadget.

“It was still in the box, and we had to read the instruction booklet to turn it on,” says Hale, remembering the challenge.

The note had geographic coordinates, and the gadget was something the students had never seen at the time - a global positioning system (GPS). “That was long before we had cell phones to do that,” says Hale.

After figuring out the system - and the assignment - the students spent 30 minutes roaming the campus in search of their teacher. Finally, they came up with coordinates near the front of campus and were certain of their accuracy, but there was still no sign of Odom. Just when the students began griping at each other for not understanding the system or the coordinates, Odom climbed down from a nearby tree laughing. Everyone received perfect grades.

“He always had a twinkle in his eye and a project up his sleeve,” says Hale of Odom. “I never worried about being bored or disinterested in his class. He had a knack for relating classroom concepts to relevant issues in the real world.”

Hale took one of Odom’s classes by chance the first semester of her junior year. “After that, I made absolutely sure I would be in his classes the rest of my time at MSMS.”

The 2016-17 academic year marks Odom’s

20th anniversary at MSMS. He started in August 1996, moving to Mississippi from Kansas where he spent five years at Kansas State University. At KSU he taught and conducted post-doctoral research funded by grants from NASA and the USDA. Odom took the position at MSMS because he and his wife had young children and wanted to be closer to their families in New Orleans and Birmingham, Ala.

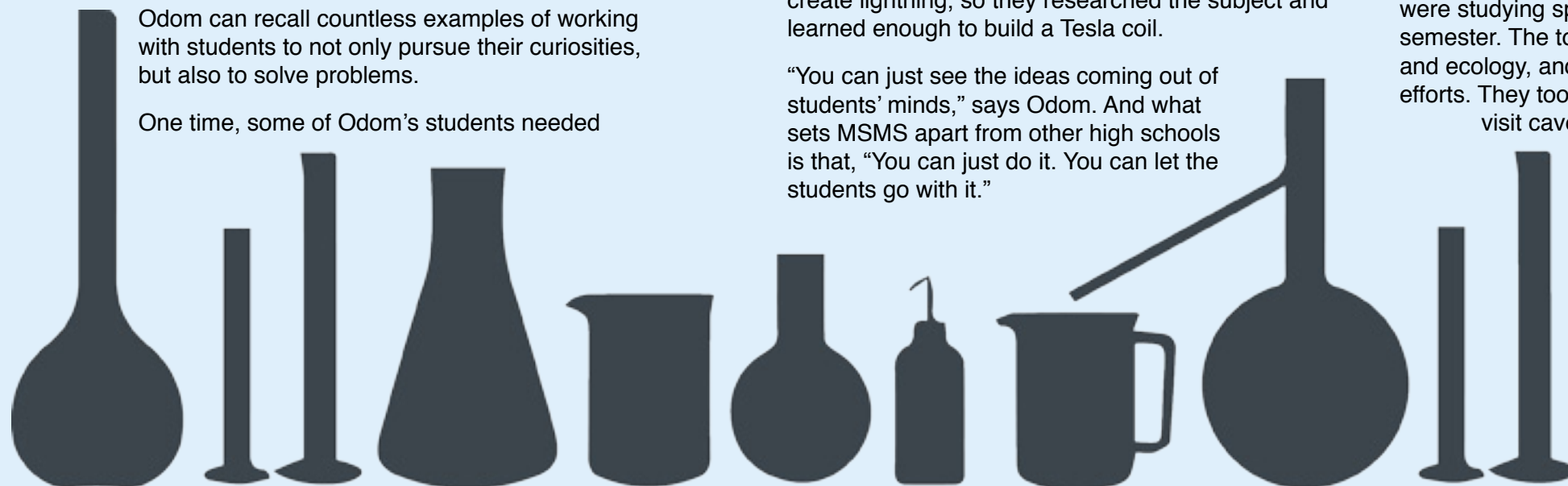
David Thompson, an engineer with a Ph.D., was the Academic Director for MSMS at the time. Thompson was interested in creating a college-like research environment at MSMS.

“He understood science and hired several Ph.D. scientists and mathematicians who really transformed the place, just the right mix,” says Odom.

Odom’s original plan was to stay for a few years and then evaluate his next steps. But at MSMS, he found “a truly unique situation with diverse students and stimulating colleagues.” Three years turned to five, and Odom made the decision to stay long-term. Since then, he has become known among students, parents, fellow educators and administrators for creating memorable hands-on learning experiences, extending learning beyond the classroom and for being the type of educator who builds upon students’ natural curiosity and facilitates discovery.

Odom can recall countless examples of working with students to not only pursue their curiosities, but also to solve problems.

One time, some of Odom’s students needed



to melt and shape aluminum for a project they were working on. Odom and Jed Leggett, a former MSMS student who studied physics at Mississippi State University and returned to MSMS as a teacher, helped the students build a makeshift foundry using a bucket and a porcelain ring.

Several other students, over a few years, wanted to create lightning, so they researched the subject and learned enough to build a Tesla coil.

“You can just see the ideas coming out of students’ minds,” says Odom. And what sets MSMS apart from other high schools is that, “You can just do it. You can let the students go with it.”

He’s let the students go with it even beyond the MSMS campus, partnering with teachers around the state to create learning experiences in which MSMS high school students and elementary school students learn together and teach each other. In the early 2000s, Odom partnered with Amy Driskill, a West Hills Elementary School teacher in Meridian who specialized in gifted education. Driskill’s fourth- and fifth-grade students were studying speleology - the study of caves - one semester. The topic had elements of biology, geology and ecology, and Odom and Driskill decided to combine efforts. They took both sets of students on a field trip to visit caverns in Alabama, and the students later

worked together to build a walk-in replica of the cave for Driskill’s classroom. The real beauty of the effort, Driskill said to Odom during the project, is that they were not just going to teach Driskill’s students and Odom’s students about speleology. They were going to open the replica to all students at West Hills and teach the entire school.

“These are the times when the real learning takes place,” says Odom.



## These are the times when real learning takes place...

“When they’re teaching each other and learning from their peers and not just from me.”

Whether you call it problem-based learning, project-based learning, extended learning, experiential learning or something else entirely, Odom’s approach to teaching both in and outside the classroom isn’t new. But it’s not yet common either.

American philosopher John Dewey initially promoted the idea of “learning by doing” in his 1897 book *My Pedagogical Creed*, and educators, philosophers, parents and teachers have debated its merits ever since. But there is growing evidence that the long-term effects of this approach are positive.

A research summary published by *Edutopia*, an

initiative of the George Lucas Educational Foundation which seeks to identify and spread innovative and evidence-based approaches to improving K-12 learning, notes “When implemented well, [project-based learning] increases long-term retention of content, helps students perform as well as or better than traditional learners in high-stakes tests, improves problem-solving and collaboration skills and improves students’ attitudes towards learning.”

A 2010 study published by the Institute of Education Sciences and the Regional Educational Laboratory West shows that economics students who engaged in a problem-based curriculum outscored peers who pursued a traditional track. They also performed better in problem-solving and in their application of knowledge to real-world challenges.

That’s exactly the difference Odom has been able to make at MSMS.

“We’re not teaching to the test,” he says. “All of the standards are being met and then some.”

Because MSMS is a residential high school with all hands on deck most of the time, Odom has had the unique opportunity to teach and engage with students even beyond academics. He’s coached soccer, advised the Student Environmental Awareness League (S.E.A.L.), overseen the Science Olympiads and served as an adviser to the Gay Student Alliance.

That living-learning experience is also what sets MSMS apart in Odom’s eyes.

“I contend that you get a diploma from MSMS,” he says. “But nowhere on that diploma does it convey the relationships you build and the cultural exchange you experience.”

### His students agree that experience has value beyond measure.

“The entire MSMS experience is educational and important,” says Hale. “I learned a good deal about classes I didn’t even take. ... MSMS immerses you in a culture of learning. It’s a place where it’s cool to be excited about what you’ve learned.”

Now, as Odom enters his 20th year at MSMS, his approach has not only crossed academic disciplines, spanned grade levels and gone beyond the walls of the classroom and the boundaries of the campus. It’s extending to new generations as well.

A few years ago, Odom was traveling to attend a science event. He ran into Christopher “Topher” Brown Mykolyk, a former student who is now teaching at a science, math and technology-focused high school in New York. While catching up, Odom says Mykolyk exclaimed that he’s teaching his students in the same way Odom and Dr. Gil Katzenstein (a former MSMS chemistry teacher and friend of Odom’s) taught him, and he’s loving it.

“Dr. O was a great influence on my decision to become a biology teacher,” says Hale, who now teaches grades 10-12 at Terry High School in Terry, Miss. “I use a few of the labs from his classes as I teach my own kids now. I only hope I can make a fraction of the impact he has made on Mississippi students.”

# ALUMNI Q&A



**Ysolde Aquino Carreon,**  
23, of Byram, Miss. (c/o 2012)

**Ysolde Aquino Carreon,**  
23, of Byram, Miss. (c/o 2012) currently resides in Tampa, Florida.



**Q&A** **What are your professional goals?**  
My professional goals include obtaining a design engineering job, earning a master's degree in mechanical engineering, and getting a professional engineering license.

**Why did you go to MSMS?**

I went to MSMS because I wanted to challenge myself academically.

**At what age or in what grade did you first learn about MSMS, and when did you know you wanted to apply?**

I first learned about MSMS when I was in 10th grade. A friend of my sister's was a junior there at the time. I knew then that MSMS was the opportunity I have been waiting for, and I instantly applied without any doubts.

**What about the school most attracted you to MSMS?**

What attracted me the most about MSMS was its diverse environment.

**Describe your first day at MSMS. Was it exactly what you expected, or did anything surprise you? Is there one feeling that stands out in your memory?**

My first day at MSMS was exactly what I expected. It instantly became my second home. I remember feeling a little bit overwhelmed about being away from my family, but I also remember feeling relieved knowing that I was surrounded by the welcoming faculty, staff and classmates. I loved the fact that the faculty and staff members took their time familiarizing everyone's faces and names. I'm sure it made the students feel special. I know I did.

**What academic experience or teacher at MSMS impacted you the most?**

Advanced Physics with Mr. Dennis Reed challenged my initial goal to be a nurse. Mr. Reed went above and beyond teaching the class. It was in his class that I realized I like solving problems. After a semester as a nursing major, I followed my heart and decided to switch to mechanical engineering.

**What student life experience impacted you the most?**

The extra-curricular activities at MSMS impacted me the most. It gave me the time-management skills I needed in college.

**Do you think MSMS is important to Mississippi's students, the city of Columbus and/or the state itself? If so or if not, why?**

I believe that MSMS is a critical part of Mississippi. For the students, it is an opportunity to grow academically. For Columbus and the state of Mississippi, it is a pride.

**What aspect(s) of MSMS do you hope never change?**

I hope that the diversity aspect of MSMS never changes. It allows the students to completely be themselves and to openly share their culture to everyone.

**Do you have any hopes for MSMS alumni, present and future?**

I hope to see both the present and future MSMS alumni continuously striving to reach their personal goals, as well as bring honor to their alma mater.

**What advice do you have for current MSMS students?**

Take the college level courses so you're ahead once you get to college.



# SEAMAN TO ADMIRAL BY 2032

By Theo Hummer (c/o 1995)



Growing up in Hollandale, Mississippi, Desmond Walker yearned to see the world and was often told he could do anything he put his mind to. Like many MSMSers, he was the smartest kid in his class, and grown-ups said he could be president of the United States one day. But he couldn't help noticing that none of the presidents so far had looked like him. Desmond realized that African American kids needed models of achievement to look up to. He decided that he would be the role model he had longed to see. Now a lieutenant commander in the United States Navy supervising the operation and maintenance of the two nuclear power plants on the

*USS Carl Vinson*, Desmond has certainly achieved success worth aspiring to. But he's nowhere near done.

Desmond graduated from MSMS in 1996. He had been offered a Navy ROTC scholarship, but he was too eager to see the world to settle into university. He enlisted in the Navy at the very bottom, as a Seaman, and trained as an electronics technician. During his first tour he saw Crete, Paris, and Dubai. He celebrated France's *World Cup* victory in Marseille and was baptized in the Jordan River near Haifa, Israel. He went to Portugal, Italy, Spain, Bahrain, and Oman. He loved traveling

and the sense of accomplishment he got from progressing towards specific mission goals, but he says, "I knew I was performing beneath my potential revealed while at MSMS." (Desmond is careful to point out that his views are his own and don't necessarily represent those of the Department of Defense or its components.) "So I applied for a commission as an officer via the *Seaman-To-Admiral 21 Program*," which sends sailors to university, propelling their careers from the enlisted track to the officer track and opening up appealing leadership opportunities.

Despite Desmond's MSMS background, the bachelor's degree program in electronics technology wasn't easy. For one thing, eight years had passed since he had last studied calculus and physics in depth, and as he points out, "If you don't use it, you lose it!" But Desmond persevered, and in 2005, he graduated and was commissioned as a surface warfare officer. He reported to the *USS Bataan*, an amphibious assault carrier powered by conventional geared steam turbines and carrying anywhere from 1,000 to 3,000 Navy and Marine personnel. It was there that he learned never to take his new leadership role for granted. One night when Desmond was serving as officer of the deck, the *Bataan* had a near-miss with a small fishing boat in the Mediterranean. Desmond feared he had caused a collision at sea and when the ship's captain relieved him of his watch, he was sure that his career was over. But he kept working. "I assembled my watch team and various logs and documents to recreate what had happened. We had a discussion about bridge resource management." His commanding officer never lost confidence in Desmond, and he was back on the bridge for his next regularly scheduled watch. "Needless to say, I have never taken watchstanding

for granted since."

Desmond's team approach to problem solving and troubleshooting is at the center of the leadership strategy he's proudest of as a Navy officer. At moments when "morale was low" and "sailors had given up on believing in their enlisted and officer chain of command," Desmond has emphasized "controlling our destiny through detailed planning, covering for each other and really just pushing through." By being careful not to blame his sailors for circumstances beyond their control while actively promoting effective workers, Desmond creates a culture of trust among the personnel he commands and "puts them in positions to succeed." Time and again, he has been able to revive morale and rekindle team spirit in discouraged sailors, even eliciting recommitment to the military from personnel who had considered quitting. Desmond says, "I owe that mentality to MSMS teacher Dr. Mary Davidson. Her optimism toward our capacity to learn and appreciate the sciences was contagious. Even when some of my classmates weren't 'feeling it' in class, she would find a way to pique interest in the lesson for that day. Each day I go to work, I look for ways to create an environment where my junior sailors feel that they can be successful."

Since his time on the *Bataan*, Desmond has gone on to study at the Naval Nuclear Power School,



widely acknowledged as the most demanding academic program in the U.S. military. Desmond achieved his nuclear certification through a three-year program of graduate academic study and hands-on training. "Yes, I struggled," Desmond says, "but I passed! My mantra has been **#KeepGrindin** ever since." He also credits his wife, his two daughters and his son for supporting him through thick and thin.

Desmond's concerns for the future of the U.S. Military and MSMS alike center on the scarcity of funding that the public sector has faced for the past decade or more. "Fewer people, dated material support, antiquated equipment and increased operational tempo continue to impact our fleet," he says, and despite military personnel's determination to do their best with the resources they have, "I fear we have passed our breaking point." Similarly, Desmond hopes that MSMS's state funding can "be reconfigured to ensure that all students can attend without the help of the MSMS Foundation. I hope MSMS's doors never close."

As for Desmond's ambitions for his own future, "it is important," he says, "for me to be an example for all those that come after me. I want to show all how to walk in integrity, but it's especially important for me toward African Americans" since as a junior sailor, he encountered so few African American officers. Desmond recommends that MSMS students hoping to follow in his footsteps should "possess technical competence and capacity, contribute to diversity of thought and seek mentorship early." Desmond's long-term goal is a career that spans from his humble beginnings as a Seaman, the Navy's lowest rank, to its highest, Admiral. He has set his sights on becoming the first African-American Chief of Naval Operations, though he says he would be delighted to be the second or third if another African American officer makes it before he can get there.



# MSMS Reunion Weekend 2017

Classes of '92, '97, '02, '07 & '12  
March 31-April 1, 2017 • Columbus, Mississippi

## SAVE THE DATE

### MARCH 31 AND APRIL 1, 2017

REGISTRATION  
BEGINS 1-1-2017

[WWW.MSMSAA.ORG](http://WWW.MSMSAA.ORG)





# Doc Shalin Patel

By Sarah Christopher Sapp (c/o 1999)

While Dr. Shalin Patel is quite arguably the most lovable and committed member of the MSMS class of 1999, he is also a highly regarded dental professional with several years of clinical experience. Patel is responsible for developing procedures and finding solutions to create successful dental practices. With a hands-on, leadership-focused approach to achieving results in a dynamic, patient-oriented work environment, he has a proven track record of building and training teams around a cohesive growth strategy and clear leadership vision.



An administrator who has helped create core values based on collaboration and cooperation, Patel is responsible for helping with the development, execution and monitoring of clinical standards and practice protocols. He manifests a culture geared towards patient centered clinical care by recruiting, training and working with elite dentists from the finest schools across the nation.

He interacts with local dental lab

technicians along with supply and manufacturing vendors to ensure only the best materials and supplies are used, thus enabling all offices to offer patients an exclusive warranty on all dental work. Patel helps uphold the core clinical philosophy in that all dentists, by using state of the art technology and cutting-edge techniques, strive to provide and maintain the highest quality of dentistry.

Patel attended the University of Mississippi for both his undergraduate studies and for dental school. In dental school, he took a leadership role during his tenure as student body president and also graduated in the top tier of his class and won numerous academic, leadership and research awards. Based on years of exceptional clinical experience and commitment to continuing education, Patel has been recognized several times as one of *America's Top Dentists* by the Consumers' Research Council of America and been recognized by multiple local and national dental organizations.

His friends will tell you that he is the same guy they met when they walked into Peyton hall. "We shared a dorm room almost 20 years ago," said classmate and friend Matt Brough. "He still listens to and knows every word to to the newest hip hop song. He still drives his car too slow so that everyone can see him driving it. He is the same guy with a full heart who brings joy to all around him, only now the the inspiration for his joy is his beautiful wife and amazing kids. I would say the only difference in the Shalin of today and the Shalin of the MSMS days is that now he makes me call him Doc."

## Q&A:

### Who was your favorite teacher and why?

Honestly there was never a favorite teacher just a lot of individual leaders that impacted my life. What I appreciated most about MSMS is that teachers were no longer looked at as an authority figure but more as a friend and mentor—someone you could openly discuss concepts, challenge ideas and talk to more as a colleague than a traditional student-teacher setting.

### What was your favorite class?

I was more active in organizations, group settings and leadership roles like class officer or Emissary positions were my favorite memories. I still use the skills I learned at MSMS by being encouraged to interact with diverse groups of people from all walks of life every day as I recruit, hire and train dentists and clinical teams across the state of Texas. We are committed to recruiting, training and retaining the very best dental care professionals in the industry. We help fill openings by providing applicants who can offer the highest standard of care and are committed to professional excellence.

### Who were your best friends and who do you keep in touch with? Which MSMSers helped you along the way?

My best friend, and still today he is one of my closest fiends and biggest supporters, has always been Matt Brough. We were randomly paired as roommates during our junior year. We have always shared a special bond till today: We keep in touch regularly. We have been close throughout college life and professionally. We both lived in DFW for a few years. I still would

do anything for him today - he can't get away from me because he's also one of my patients! I am still connected to many others from my class and the class below me, in which I have attended reunions, weddings and just a friendly conversation, which gives me memories I still carry with me until this day.

As far as working together, I have always been in touch with Chad Edmonson. He eventually moved from New York to Dallas then to Mississippi, and I am happy to be working with him as my wealth manager. It is very interesting because I met well over 20 firms who I interviewed to manage my assets, but in the end people may have wondered of all the investment groups in the world, why would I choose someone with an independent firm based out of Mississippi? I chose him simply because of my personal relationship of knowing him since I was 15-years-old, seeing his work ethic for two decades and knowing he will always treat me as a client just as much as he would treat anyone in his own family.

Countless others are still close to me and have helped me along the way just by simple motivational words, sharing stories or even a "like" on Facebook - it really goes a long way to show support.

### Why dentistry?

Just like many high school students, I was uncertain of what I wanted to do. I started out as a computer science major, then changed to biology, then changed to business administration and marketing, then ended up back to my passion, which was always healthcare. I was always fond of medicine, but I was driven to dentistry because I saw myself being able to apply more a business and medical approach, which lead me to help be a part of the culture we have today at DECA.



**You have the largest practice in Dallas, right?**

We have an exceptional culture that resonates with energy and a passion to deliver comprehensive patient care that is convenient and affordable. DECA Dental takes pride in hiring people who are committed to catering to all patients by offering the best materials in a modern and welcoming environment that our patients love. We take pride in hiring people from different backgrounds to cultivate leadership and upward mobility throughout the company. Ambitious individuals, even with little or no dental experience, are trained to excel both personally and professionally. We have a culture of continuous improvement designed to challenge our people, foster their professional development and empower them to learn from one another. Our growth depends on building deep, long-lasting relationships with our patients and our team members.

I have two dentist partners and we own the largest privately-owned dental group in all of Texas and we are based in Dallas. By the end of this year we will have 60 dental offices throughout Dallas, Houston, Austin and San Antonio and look forward to continue to expand outside of Texas in 2017, hopefully one day into Mississippi. DECA Dental has received many honors and awards. Some of the more notable ones are being recognized as *Inc.* magazine's *Top 5000* fastest growing companies in the nation along with being selected by *D* magazine as *Dallas-Fort Worth's Premier Dental Group*. Additionally, the *Dallas Business Journal* recognized DECA Dental as one the top 100 companies in the region and the 31st fastest growing company in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex.



**SUPPORT EVERYTHING YOU KNOW AND LOVE ABOUT MSMS!**

**GIVE TO THE MSMS FOUNDATION**

[WWW.MSMSFOUNDATION.COM](http://WWW.MSMSFOUNDATION.COM)

You already know that MSMS changes lives. You can be a part of the "opportunity for excellence" for the next generation.

Help us to ensure the amazing "Opportunity for Excellence" that you were part of is available to a new generation!

Contact Kassie Brooks, Director of Operations [kbrooks@msmsfoundation.com](mailto:kbrooks@msmsfoundation.com) or 662-243-0353.



# MEMORY

By Theo Hummer (c/o 1995)

Everyone comes to MSMS having been “the only one” back home—oddballs, misfits. Then we come together in Columbus and find that finally we belong. We learn together, we live together, we get into mischief together and when time comes to graduate we look back and can’t believe it’s been only two years: the bonds we’ve formed with our classmates, teachers and staff are steel-strong. We’re family. And like any family, we egg each other on.

At 16, I’d been wrestling, as everyone does, with who I wanted to be and how to show that to the world. For me, it was wrapped up in having different values from the majority of people in the place where I was from. I’d recently become a vegetarian, for example. I couldn’t quite articulate why, but I knew it had something to do with not being a Republican and something else to do with a feeling of affinity for people who lived “out there in the world,” beyond Mississippi’s horizons, in the bigger and wider places I aspired to. I’d come to MSMS because I knew it would be a springboard into that wider world. In a way, it was a wider world. Meridian High School wasn’t nearly as racially diverse as MSMS. It didn’t offer integrative calculus or Latin II, and no one there had ever come to class dyed blue from head to toe.

Appearance was a big part of this struggle to find a self and a way to express it. Like most Mississippi girls, I felt keenly the pull of conventional feminine attractiveness.

At the same time, my budding feminism and dawning queer identity led me to question those conventions. Lots of my MSMS classmates were experimenting with appearance, too. Along with the aforementioned blue dye incident, cross-dressing and funny hats figure prominently in my memories. In good company, then, I felt my way by experiment: I wore makeup; I didn’t wear makeup. I shaved my legs; I didn’t shave my legs. I admired the punk hairdos of the previous decade, but in Mississippi in 1994, liberty spikes seemed like an engineering mystery far beyond anything I was learning in Mrs. Perry’s advanced physics class. Also, I was pretty sure the student handbook included a clause forbidding “non-natural” hair colors.

In the final stretch of my junior year, we were all punch-drunk, our collective sleep deficit mounting. When Bethany Fayard bounced up to me after head count one weeknight and announced that somebody had brought a pair of hair clippers back to campus after spring break, I was feeling daring. “Let me shave your head,” she begged. “Okay,” I said. “No, really,” she said. “Really,” I said.

She’d already cropped half my curls as closely as she could with a pair of safety scissors before she mentioned that those clippers belonged to a boy, so we wouldn’t be able to get hold of them until morning.

She’d just finished cropping it all—to what beautiful effect I’m sure you can imagine—when Fant’s, director Charlotte Heath, appeared in the doorway.

I swear all the blood drained out of Charlotte’s cheerful pink face when she saw me. Calculations flashed across her eyes about whether my mother would have a chance to skin her alive before her boss fired her. Finally she found her voice. “You,” she said to me, “come with me. We’re calling your mother right now. And you,” she said to Bethany, “fix this.”

Charlotte marched me down to her office and I dialed my mother’s number. It was past midnight, and my mom was a public school teacher who usually got up around five. She answered groggily, “Hello?” and then I could hear panic enter her voice when she realized who was calling. “Are you all right? Is everything okay?” I explained to her that I had given myself an unauthorized haircut. She took a minute to process, then asked me to put Charlotte on. “I appreciate what you do,” my mom told Charlotte, “and I know these kids are a handful. But please, unless she’s in the hospital or in jail, you can wait and call me about it in the morning.”

All that was left for Charlotte to do was go over to Peyton and get the boy’s clippers. Bethany cleaned up the jagged lines and tufts that the safety scissors had left. Soon my scalp was covered with nothing but a fine brown down. I checked the mirror: I looked fierce.

But when I finally got to sleep, I discovered my unconscious wasn’t so confident. All night I was plagued by dreams of long, flowing locks and of pangs of grief for lost beauty. The next morning, I dressed to maximize my femininity: flowered baby doll dress, mascara, delicate pink lipstick. People turned to look in the dining hall and in Hooper. Halfway through the morning, I was pulled out of class, summoned to the office of our director of admissions, Dr. Katherine Bunch. Was this the other shoe dropping? Dr. Bunch wasn’t usually in charge of administering discipline. I wasn’t certain what to expect. But when I got to her office, Dr. Bunch

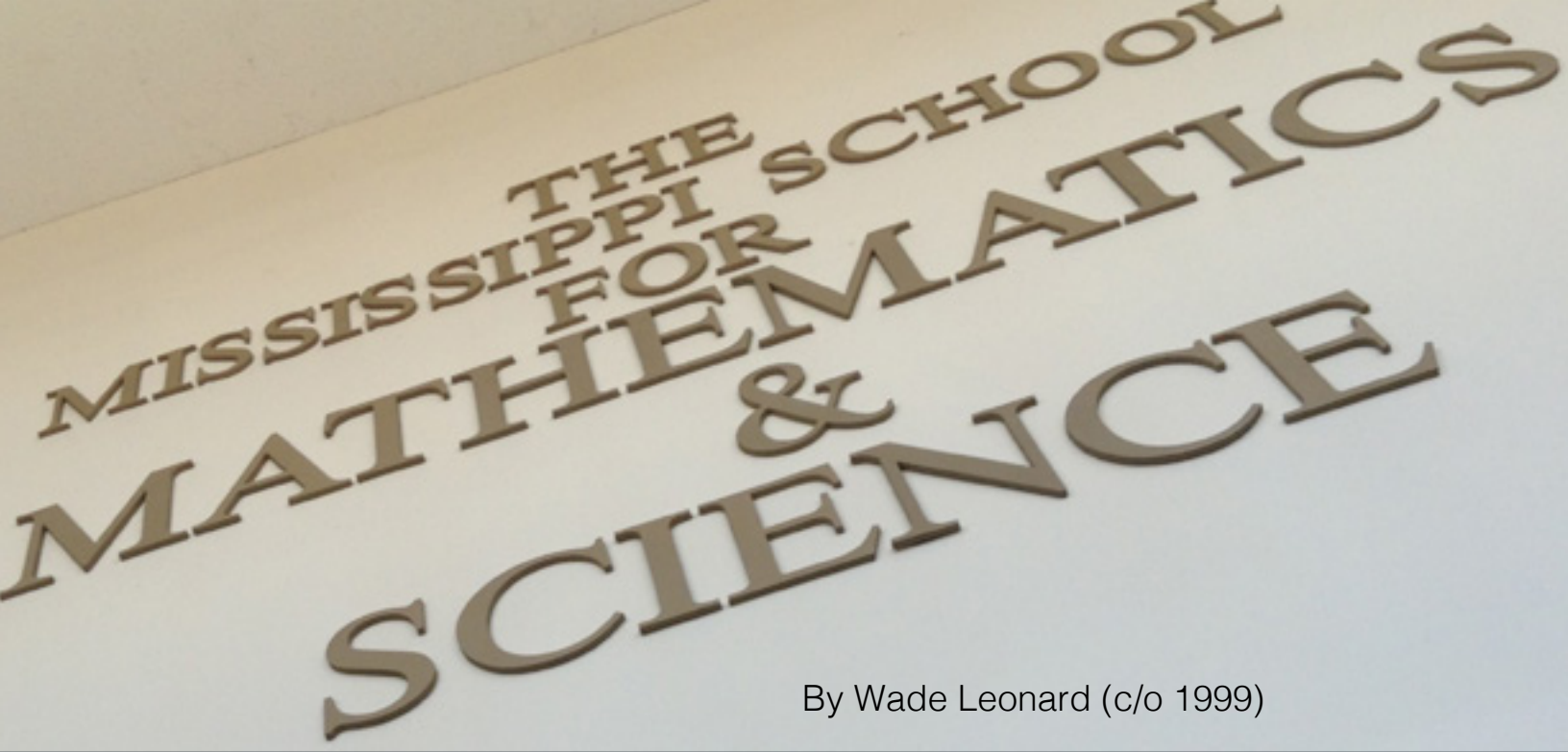


greeted me with her usual warmth. We sat in chairs on the same side of her desk, and she leaned towards me conspiratorially as we spoke.

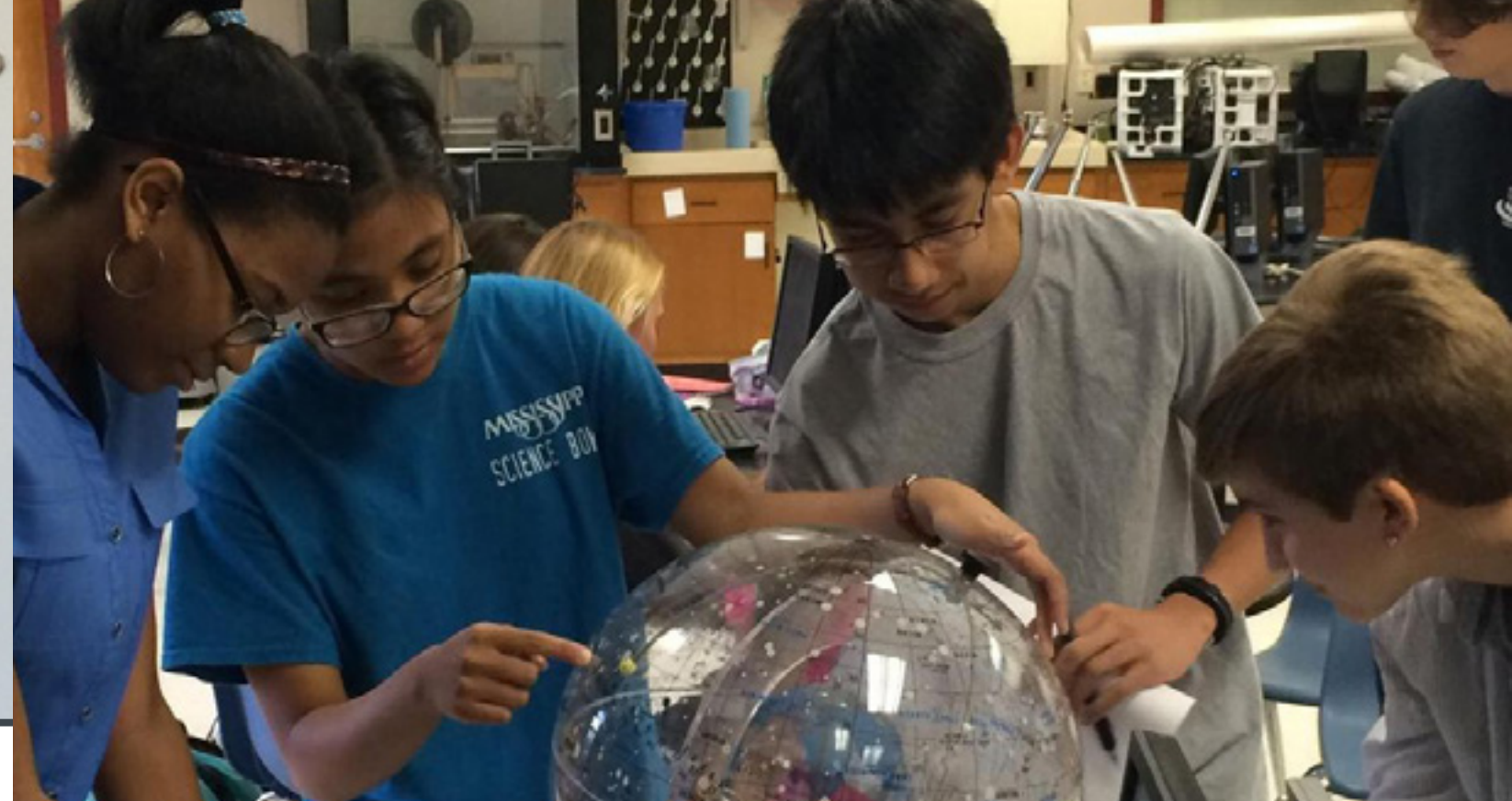
“Did you know I’ve been battling cancer?” she asked. There had been rumors, but this was the first I’d heard for sure. “Chemotherapy has been hard, but the worst part has been losing my hair.” Her hand fluttered towards what I suddenly realized was a chic little wig. “These are so uncomfortable,” she said, “but I felt ugly with my bald head—until I saw you this morning. Then I realized I can go wigless and feel stylish.” She reached up and snatched off her wig. Without her hair, her moist eyes seemed enormous. “Thank you for showing me bald can be beautiful.” We hugged, and she called in a yearbook photographer to take our picture together. In it, we’re beaming, unencumbered, delightedly free.

I think back often to the great gift that Dr. Bunch gave on that day to an oddball misfit. She showed me that my strangeness need be neither abrasive nor an end in itself. By following my own idiosyncratic path, I had created a space of possibility for others to inhabit. What power there was in the realization that oddity could be generosity! And in making me feel that my impulsive gesture of hair rebellion had been a kindness to her. Dr. Bunch did me a great kindness, too. This is what the MSMS family nurtures in all its members, inside the classroom and out: the power to make our own weird ways in the world and the confidence that we do so not for ourselves alone, but in service to others.





By Wade Leonard (c/o 1999)



In a small, grey room to the left of Hooper Lobby, MSMS mathematics instructor, Karin McWhorter, stands behind a tall desk and talks passionately and animatedly about algebra. She encourages, she corrects and she clearly becomes joyful when someone seems to “get it.” Notably, there is not another living soul in the room, and one could be forgiven for thinking McWhorter was talking to herself. However, upon further inspection, a computer screen in the room shows several young faces listening intently to what she has to say. One of the students timidly provides an answer to the question McWhorter just asked.

“That’s right!” she said. “Great job!”

These 40 students staring back at McWhorter through cyberspace are not MSMS students. Rather, they are eighth grade students from schools in Leake, Neshoba, and Newton counties. Through a network of cameras and computers provided by a grant from the USDA, these students are able to take algebra I, from an MSMS teacher, before high school.

MSMS was designed to focus on high achieving and academically gifted juniors and seniors, so one could be forgiven if this new distance-learning program seems out of synch with this focus. However, programs like this one and many others the school is undertaking are vital to MSMS’s continued success and fulfillment of its mission.

No one disputes that MSMS offers the students who attend the school one of the richest and most innovative educations in the United States. The school’s students boast *ACT* scores nearly ten points

higher than the national average and near universal college matriculation. Each year, for the past three years, MSMS graduating classes have been offered in excess of \$20 million in scholarship dollars from universities and colleges all over the world. The sheer number of classes offered, opportunities presented and direct attention to students dwarfs the capability of most other public schools in the country, and there is no question that for the vast majority of MSMS veterans the school has served as the keystone to their academic, professional and social lives – an opportunity for excellence, indeed.

Yet the fact remains that over the course of nearly 30 years, MSMS has graduated just over 3,000 students, and many of those graduates pursue careers and opportunities outside the *Magnolia State*.

“Our job is to work with the raw talent of the students that we have with the hope they will give back to the state in the future in a meaningful way,” said MSMS Executive Director, Dr. Germain McConnell. “The difference is that now we are actively providing more resources, more knowledge and giving students better ideas of the ways they can give back before they graduate.”

According to United States census data, it is estimated that in 2015 about a quarter of Mississippi’s population was composed of individuals less than 18 years of age, that’s roughly 750,000 school-aged children. The data also estimates that in 2015 the state was home to 40,919 17-year-old children (roughly, the number of potential high school seniors in the state). Mississippi

Department of Education data from the same year reports that 21.6% of students did not graduate from high school. Comparing this figure to the raw census estimations indicates that about 7,269 Mississippians did not successfully complete their high school education in 2015 alone.

How can MSMS hope to maintain its relevance to the rest of the state when faced with numbers such as these?

MSMS cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that its primary mission is to “enhance the future of

Mississippi.” It cannot afford to simply do nothing more than quietly educate the students that call her home. In order to maintain relevance, or even existence, the school must prove that it has value to the state as a whole. MSMS must be a leader in Mississippi education. It must be a tireless advocate for gifted and STEM programs. And it must export the innovation for which it is so famous.

Fortunately, the current leaders of MSMS know this, and have taken dramatic steps to increase the scope of the school in terms of outreach, leadership and innovation.



# Outreach

Most people who grew up attending a Mississippi school had the opportunity to take algebra I in the eighth grade. Due to statewide budget issues, teacher shortages and higher focus upon standardized testing, this is no longer the case in many schools around the state.

“By giving students the opportunity to take algebra I in the eighth grade, we open doors for them to be able to take more advanced math courses before graduation,” said MSMS Director for Admissions and Advancement, Rick Smith. “For some of these schools that have a difficulty attracting quality math instructors, providing this course through distance education is one of the best ways to ensure that those students get a solid math foundation.”

Through a near half-million dollar grant awarded by the USDA, MSMS can step in to fill that gap. Forty eighth-graders are currently taking algebra I from MSMS, and plans are in motion to offer more classes to more students across the state.

“What gets me excited is that for many of these schools, there is no way they would be able to offer this program unless we stepped in to offer it,” said McWhorter, who teaches the algebra I class.

While generous, the grant that makes this program possible only covers the cost of equipment; it does not fund personnel, software, or infrastructure requirements (like cables). The grant only lasts three years, after which, other funding sources must be found.

“Because MSMS teachers are required to have a master’s and 18 hours they are perfectly suited to meet needs in areas like higher level math,” said MSMS Director for Academic Affairs, Kelly Brown. “I would like to see this program one day become an avenue by which every student in the state has access to the quality and rigor we offer at MSMS.”

Although it is the most visible of the new programs MSMS currently offers, it is hardly the only one. During the 2015-2016 school year alone, MSMS reached about 3,900 Mississippi students through its outreach programs. These programs include the well-known *Science Carnival*, math workshops and competitions, summer camps, school adoption programs, service-oriented programs like the school’s partnership with the Boys and Girls Club and many, many more.

“We serve not just the students we have on our campus, we serve students throughout schools in Mississippi,” said Dr. McConnell. “We know we don’t have all the academically talented and gifted students who are from this state on our campus. We know many of them will never attend MSMS, however, we must find ways to reach those students and encourage them to do more to reach their potential.”



# Leadership

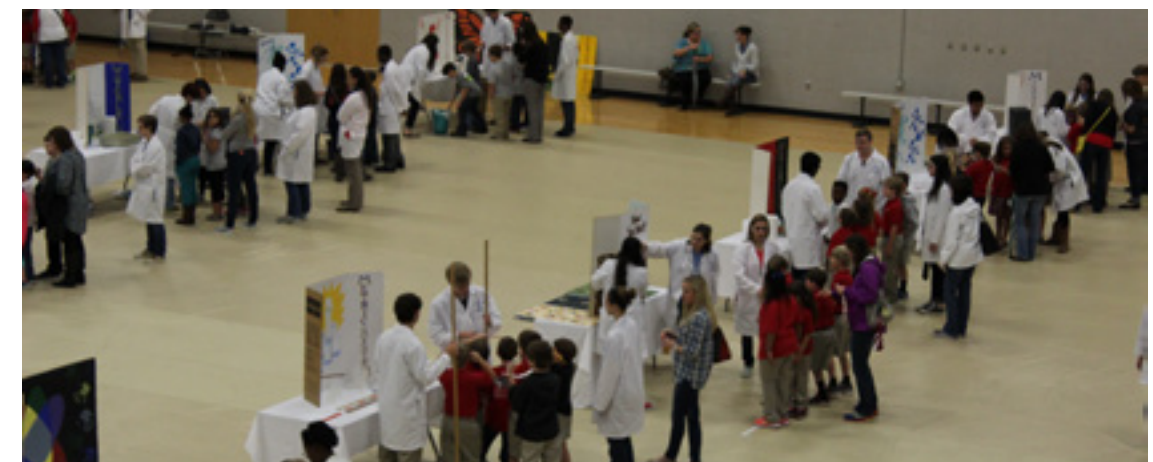
MSMS faculty members continue to lead the way in Mississippi education, and they have the awards and recognition to prove it. *National Public Radio* named MSMS history teacher, Chuck Yarborough as one of *America’s 50 Great Teachers*, and was featured on the *New Teacher Podcast*. Margaret Mary Henry, who teaches Russian and Spanish at the school, received a *Fulbright-Hays* fellowship to spend the summer studying in Russia. Physics instructor, William Funderburk, was named the recipient of the *Yale University Educator Recognition Award for Outstanding Dedication to Students*. And Lauren Zarandona was recently named a winner of the *Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching*.

“We have to inspire the kids who will be the future leaders of MS and we have to inspire their teachers,” said Zarandona. “I want to show teachers and students that learning can be a fun experience, but it can also be a rigorous and important experience.”

The MSMS faculty continues to share their expertise and innovative educational approaches with teachers across the state of Mississippi.

Each summer MSMS and the Mississippi University for Women work together to coordinate *CHAMPS (Creating High Achievement in Mathematics and Problem Solving)*, a workshop for Mississippi mathematics teachers. The workshop is designed to provide math instructors with innovative and effective classroom techniques for math instruction. Since the program began 13 years ago, MSMS math faculty has been a big part.

“We’ve been able to try different methods in an environment where it works,” said Zarandona. “Our students will tell us what works and what doesn’t. We know what’s going on because we are teaching in an ideal situation, and we can take that information and share that with other Mississippi teachers.”



# Innovation

Since its founding, MSMS has been positioned as a prime innovator in high school education. In the early 1990s, the school was one of the first in the state to offer students high speed access to the Internet, the school's mentorship and research programs remain cutting edge to this day, and programs like the famous *Tales From the Crypt* research project has been imitated since the late Carl Butler created it.

"We understand that no matter what professions our students go into, that all those individuals who, in the past, have created things and ideas that changed the world have had to think outside the box, which is, in essence, innovation," said McConnell. "We need our students to create paradigm shifts, rather than just see the world the way it is now, and that's how we are going to move Mississippi forward."

MSMS continues this tradition of innovation, perhaps most visibly, in its new engineering workshop. The new facility houses a Mac lab, three 3D printers, carpentry and machining tools and space to work. Members of the school's Engineering Club are encouraged to use the space to experiment with and build their own designs.

"The engineering space excites me because as an educator it provides me with the opportunity to instill in students the passion and belief they can make anything. If they can dream it they can build it," said Engineering Club sponsor and computer science instructor, Josh Crowson.

Among the projects that have already been built include robots, a tesla coil and a homemade capacitor. The students are currently working on building a functional *Computation Numerical Control* machine from scratch.

"I love the fact that half of the roughly 50 students in the engineering club are female students," said Brown.

And although the projects the students are creating are remarkable, engineering goes beyond the extracurricular at MSMS. Thanks to a recent partnership with Mississippi State University, the school now offers two engineering classes students can take for college credit.

"Eventually, we want engineering to be an integrated part of the MSMS curriculum along with the other STEM initiatives we are working on," said Brown.

In order to maintain relevancy, and even survive, MSMS must show that its mission and existence can benefit the entire state of Mississippi. The school must be viewed as an incubator for innovative thought, technique and instruction. It must continue to provide leadership to all those who care about the education of the state's children. It must work to reach every gifted and talented Mississippi child, regardless of whether they choose to attend MSMS or not.

Maintaining this kind of momentum is not easy. As these programs grow, as the school's reach extends, funding will continue to be a not-insignificant issue. That is why the school is working so hard to secure relationships with businesses and individuals who believe in the work of MSMS.

"I believe, as I always say, that individuals and businesses want to support MSMS. They just don't know it yet," said McConnell. "Our job is to let them know what our needs are and how they can partner with us to create a brighter future for Mississippi."

Despite these challenges, the administration, faculty and staff of MSMS are confident that MSMS provides an opportunity for excellence, not only to its student population, but also potentially to every child in the state.





# Brews, Bites, and Blues MISSISSIPPI

By Cynthia  
Henderson, (c/o1995)

Saturday morning allowed for a late start with late registrations in Hogarth by the mail boxes and presentations upstairs. Alums were invited to hear a school update presented by Dr. Germain McConnell, the Executive Director of MSMS. His presentation was followed by an MSMS Foundation update presented by Cindy Henderson, President of the MSMS Foundation.

The MSMS experience is at once a contradictory endless and brief moment in our high school experience. Simultaneously it's that night where you're cramming for a calculus exam that seems to stretch on forever and that moment at graduation where you're hugging your best friend and you wonder where the time could possibly have gone. After 5, 10, 15, 20, or 25 years, you get the chance to come back and remember those moments and reconnect with your classmates. For that weekend you get to forget the years, the distance and that you're no longer 18.

Just before lunch, everyone converged on the steps of Hooper for class photos. Then everyone got on a bus or walked downtown to Huck's Place to enjoy a great buffet lunch with classmates and faculty members.

Following lunch, the *Trivia Challenge*, a *Jeopardy*-style trivia game, was conducted on campus. Each class chose one representative and faced off to determine which class would be the champion. While class of 1990 alum, Shannon Eubanks smoked everyone in 2015, 2016 went to the younger classes. Class of 2006 alum Laura Lindeman (nee Chaires) was deemed the champion and winner of a \$100 Amazon gift card. Laura said "The final question was what is the official MSMS mascot, and surprisingly few got it right - blue wave." Note that "wave" and "waves" would be incorrect, it had to be "blue wave." Class of 1991 firmly believes they would have won if teams had been allowed.

On April 9 and 10<sup>th</sup>, the classes of 1991, 1996, 2006, 2011 and others came together in Columbus, Mississippi, to reconnect and reminisce. Alums showed up throughout Friday and some dropped in on other alums giving presentations to current MSMS students about their careers. Late in the afternoon, everyone congregated in Hooper Lobby and exclamations of "It's been so long! How are you?" were heard frequently. After registering, folks wandered through the Hooper halls and marveled that rooms, tiles, and labs were no longer where they once were.

Saturday evening concluded with *Brews, Bites, and Blues* at the Columbus Arts Center in Downtown Columbus. All alumni were invited and the classes of 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2006, and 2011 were well represented with more than 150 participants. Music was provided by Ms. Dawn Barham's band, the Juke Joint Gypsies. Beer and mead were provided by Lazy Magnolia Brewery and food by The Grill. Lazy Magnolia also provided the grand raffle prize, a Lazy Magnolia gift basket. The MSMS staff had unearthed a time capsule the class of 1996 had left behind and the classmates enjoyed seeing their old photos and artwork. A lot of good-natured teasing and reminiscing was had by all. Wilson Nash, class of 1996, summarized the weekend.

As dusk approached, everyone headed to Friendship Cemetery, by bus or car, to attend the last performance of the MSMS *Tales from the Crypt* for 2016. It was a great performance where we learned about milk, the things that can drive a good woman to madness, and complicated and interconnected lives of the many races present in Columbus during the years before and after the Civil War. There was a touching and unique tribute to "Mama Morris" by a student portraying Shannon Eubanks, a class of 1990 alum, and one of Ms. Judy Morris's students in the early years of MSMS. After the performance, groups broke up and made plans to meet at restaurants and bars throughout Columbus.

## ALUMNIWEEKEND16

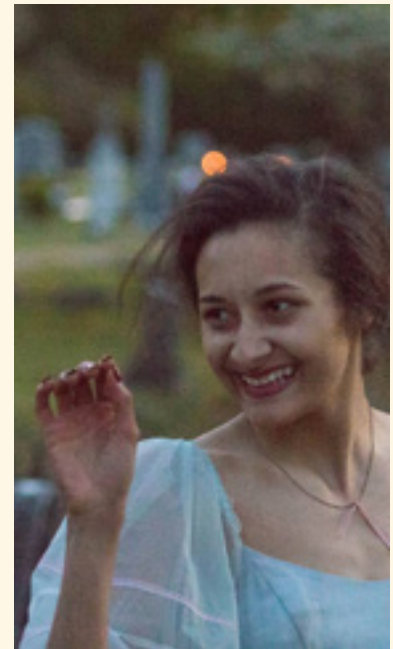




*“Time froze this past weekend... It was like we were back at school together. We laughed, we cried, we talked, we learned... I am so proud to call my fellow classmates my family.” – Wilson Nash, Class of 1996*



*“Even though we were back together with people we considered family, we were not reliving high school. We were picking off where we left off and getting to know about each other’s lives. I was shocked at how long it had been since I had seen some people because they are still so important to my life.” – Sepideh Miller (nee Baghail)*



**MSMS Reunion Weekend 2017**

Classes of '92, '97, '02, '07 & '12  
March 31-April 1, 2017 • Columbus, Mississippi



**MSMS Foundation**  
1100 College Street, MUW-190  
Columbus, MS 39701



A publication of the MSMS Foundation.