

# Faculty who nurture students offer a lifelong gift

BY KRISTEN M. HAINS  
Special to Record-Eagle

During the first few weeks of 9th grade journalism class back in 1984, our teacher, Kay Walker, provided us with a lot of information about newspaper and yearbook production.

One day, she went to the board and wrote the number 18064 on the board. This, she explained was the job number for our yearbook. This number would appear on everything that we submitted having to do with the yearbook. She told us that by the end of the year we would have written that number so many times, that it would probably be with us for the rest of our lives.

Kay was right. I'm 34 now and I still remember that number. But it's not the only thing I took from that class. To this day, I can't forget that number, but even more unforgettable was the experience I had in her class and the impact she had on me as a future writer. If it weren't for her encouraging me as a writer, who knows what path my life might have taken instead?

Teachers truly have the power of the future in their hands. Every day they make



Freelance writer Kris Hains in her cub reporter days.

choices that shape their students and impact their lives. As students, we often sail through classes. Months turn into years and pretty soon we're looking at graduation.

Throughout our years we are touched by teachers and principals who in their own way guide our path to adulthood. We may not realize at the time, the effect these individuals have on us.

My writing recently took me on assignment to the Grand Traverse Pavilions to interview Charlene Selkirk. She lives on the second

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**Bill Nemetz, former principal at Willow Hill Elementary School**

floor and I don't ride elevators. As always, I took the stairs. When it was time to go, she said to me, "Oh why don't you just take the elevator this time?"

Selkirk, who is paralyzed from the waist down and uses a wheelchair, made me realize: It was just an elevator. So I boarded it with Patti DeAgostino, marketing director for the Pavilions. I convinced myself, it was just the two of us... it was just one floor... I would be fine. And then came a voice from the hall.

"Could you please hold the elevator?" I held the door as a woman pushed her husband into

the elevator. Now there were four of us in this little tiny elevator. I might have started hyperventilating when I heard the man in the wheelchair say, "Kristen."

Convinced I was hallucinating, I simply said, "Excuse me?" To which he replied, "Kristen Hains."

At this point I had forgotten about the elevator ride and focused on this man who seemed to know me.

"I'm Bill Nemetz. I was your principal at Willow Hill Elementary School," he said.

I was dumbfounded that this man, who I probably hadn't seen since I left 6th

grade in 1982, still remembered me. In spite of how my closest friends might try to convince me, I look a lot different than I did in 6th grade. I found myself suddenly wishing that the elevator ride had lasted longer than one floor.

I got off the elevator with DeAgostino and she said, "See? That wouldn't have happened had you taken the stairs."

She was right. Lesson learned.

The next week, I decided to go back to the Pavilions to talk to Mr. Nemetz.

Nemetz served as principal of Willow Hill Elementary School for over 20 years. In that time, he saw 350-400 students a year pass through those halls. So, how in the world did he remember me some 20 years later?

"I always made it a point to know the kids' names," he explained.

Nemetz said he was a "hands on" principal who took the time to pat a kid on the shoulder and most importantly, to be in the classrooms.

"If you're not in the classroom, you don't know what's going on," he said. "I made it a point to be in every

classroom, every day." Though Nemetz doesn't seem to think his ability to recall names is extraordinary, he makes a profound statement about the power of those who spend their lives in education.

I may not have realized it 20 years ago when I walked the halls of Willow Hill Elementary School. Perhaps it's only today, when I realize that not only did he know my name then, he still knows it and the impact someone like that has on your life.

I could have taken the stairs that day at the Pavilions. But I would have missed two great life lessons. The first? Sometimes by tackling what you're most scared of, you get rewarded on the other side. Second, the choices we make today can affect us and those around us for a lifetime.

I am thankful for the education I have received and even more thankful for the people along the way, people like Kay Walker and Bill Nemetz, who took the time to know me and to make a difference in my life.

**Kristen M. Hains is a local freelance writer and author.**

# Finding sole mates: Expert advice on getting the shoe that fits best

BY MARK EDWARD NERO  
Copley News Service

One of the more difficult parts of outfitting young children is keeping them in well-fitting shoes. By the time a child's age reaches double digits, the foot size can change up to 30 times, making it challenging to ensure that footwear keeps pace.

But even if you don't have the time, financial resources or inclination to buy your youngster new shoes every few weeks, there's still a way to see to it that he or she isn't walking around aching from heel to toe.

The first, according to podiatrists and other foot experts, is to not take stock in common misconceptions parents have when buying shoes, including the belief that if the shoes don't fall off the child's feet, then they fit. This isn't necessarily true — the shoes could be

oversized. In fact, oversized shoes cause just as many problems as too-tight ones; they can cause a child's foot to roll over inside the shoe during play, causing sprains or other injuries.

Too-snug footwear is just as bad, though. Tight shoes, mixed with impact and temperature can cause the child's feet to swell up to half a size. They can also cause many other problems, including ingrown nails, calluses and blisters.

Another common misconception is that shoelaces only exist to keep your shoes from falling off. But if that were the case, any old piece of string would suffice as a lace. But believe it or not, the way athletic shoes are laced can affect the way they fit and adjust to individual bone structure.

Lacing shoes correctly is important. It's helpful to lace through each top eyelet twice to ensure a more snug fit and decrease slippage,

according to the folks at Marathon Sports, a company specializing in sports and casual footwear. Children must be careful not to tie laces too tight, as this can cause injury to the nerves or tendons on the top of the foot and ankle.

A lot of children hate hand-me-downs — and when it comes to shoes, it's with good reason. Hand-me-down sneakers are permanently molded to the dimensions of the original owner's foot. And because of this, anyone who wears the shoes later on may find them ill-fitting and/or uncomfortable.

But even if your children don't complain about the fit of their shoes, you should occasionally check how they fit. In particular, examine his or her favorite pair to make sure they haven't been outgrown.

Along with regular everyday footwear, there are also some specific rules for buying athletic shoes for chil-

dren who participate in sports.

For comfort and injury prevention, student-athletes should wear shoes designed specifically for the demands of their sport, according to Chuck Weber, spokesman for the American College of Foot & Ankle Surgeons. For example, tennis shoes are designed for side-to-side motion, while running shoes are made for forward momentum and have extra cushioning.

Also, when shopping for athletic shoes for children, remember the basics of good fit, Weber said. There should be a thumb's width from the tip of the child's toe to the end of the shoe. The toes should have room to wiggle freely. The heel of the shoe should not slip off the foot as the child walks or runs.

If specific socks are required as part of a uniform, it is important to wear these socks, or ones of the

same thickness, to try on the shoes.

And always buy flats with good lateral stability and firm heel counters for exercise. Running shoes in particular come with a variety of arch supports. Knowing what type of arch the child's foot has — high, medium or low — helps in selecting the most comfortable and supportive shoe.

If you suspect that your child's shoes may not fit

properly, take a few minutes to watch him or her performing everyday activities such as walking, running and playing sports.

An odd walk, frequent stumbling or limping can signal a problem. "Tired" legs, night pains and cramping are also signs to watch for, as is uneven wear on the soles of the shoes. If you notice any of these afflictions, a podiatrist should be consulted.

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