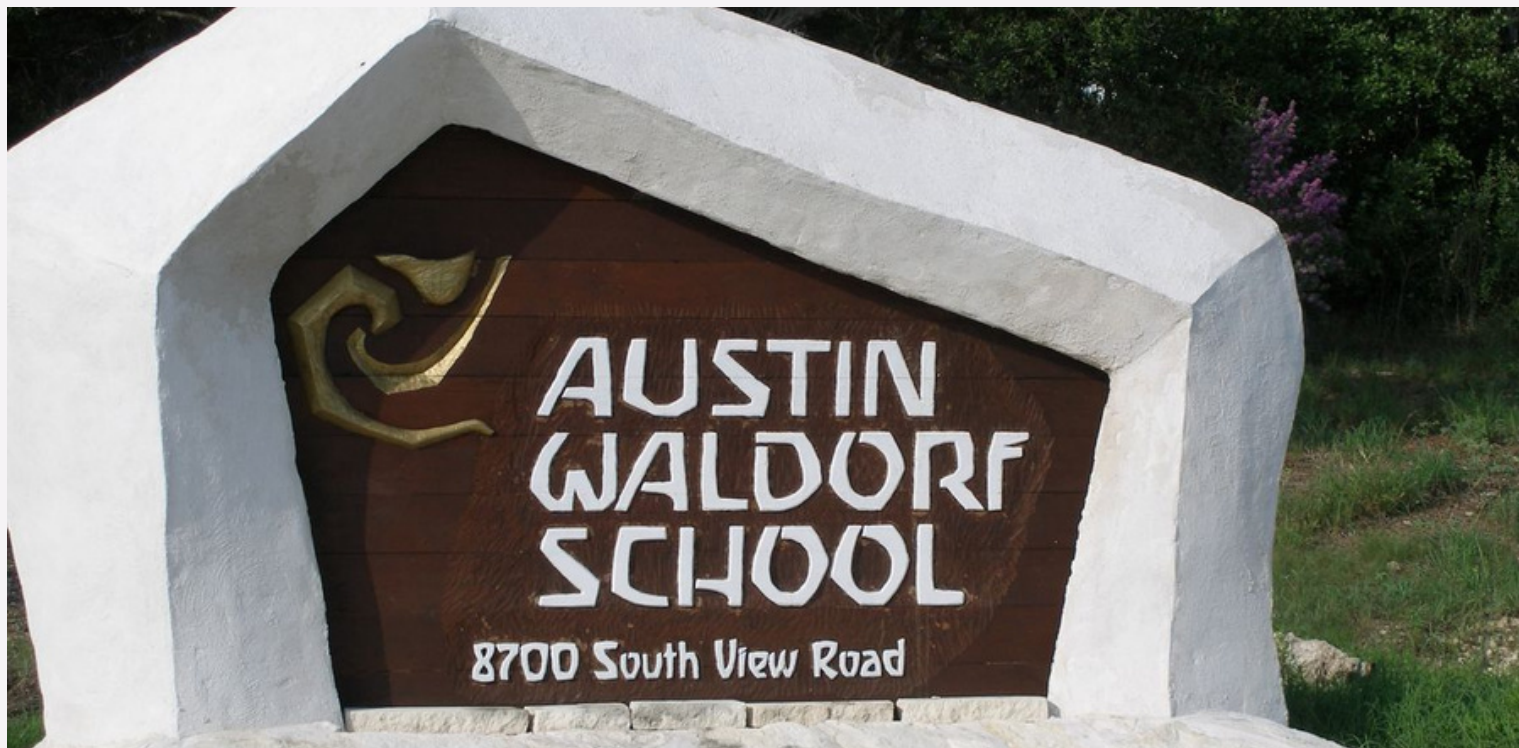


# THE ALUMNI CONNECTION

*An alumni newsletter for all the hearts that consider themselves a part of Austin Waldorf School*



## WELCOME

*by Ashleigh Lang-Tolliver*

Welcome to the Alumni Connection, a quarterly newsletter for anyone who considers themselves an Austin Waldorf School Alum. Nope, not just an AWS graduate, but rather any student, parent, faculty, admin, or even grandparent, who feels a connection to the school. Did you step foot on the AWS campus? Then welcome, you are a part of the AWS Alumni Association.

This past May, the Austin Waldorf School officially formed the Austin Waldorf School Alumni Council. The purpose of this council is to act as the liaison between the current members of the Austin Waldorf School and the larger Austin Waldorf Alumni Association body. This council came together with a desire to build a meaningful and committed AWS alumni network that offers support wherever we are in life following our time at AWS. The hope is that the council can help maintain a connection to the place that, for many of us, felt like home. Along with that, the AWS Alumni Council aspires to come together around the profound task of linking the past to the present for the purpose of upholding and nurturing the future of the Austin Waldorf School.

### WHAT'S INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

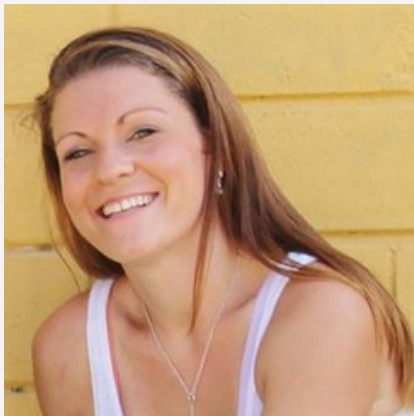
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# INTRODUCING THE AWS ALUMNI COUNCIL



Do you recognize these faces?

This eager group of Alumni is excited for the opportunity to be the connection between the current school community and you, the Austin Waldorf Alumni Association body.



**Ashleigh Lang-Tolliver (Class of 2003):** Ashleigh attended AWS from K-9th with the class of 2003. In 2017, Ashleigh returned to AWS campus as a parent. She is currently the President of the Alumni Council and the Parent Society. When not helping on the AWS campus, Ashleigh can be found working as a nurse and spending time outdoors with her 7-year-old twins.

**Ani Hanelius Phillips (Class of 2001):** Ani started at AWS in the Sungarden in 1988 and graduated in the first graduating class of the High School in 2001. After living abroad for 5 years following college, she returned to the AWS community in 2011 as a coach, then as a class teacher, and is now a member of the AWS Board of Trustees. Ani lives in South Austin with her artist and contractor husband, Joseph, three (soon to be five) children, 15 chickens and two dogs.



**Sarah Moore Laja (Class of 2001):** Sarah is an alum from the first graduating class of 2001. Her son is in the class of 2029 and her daughter is in the class of 2032. She loves her school and often feels like a bridge between two moments of the school's life.

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**Ian Pollard (Class of 2007):** Ian attended AWS from K-12, graduating in 2007. Years later, Ian is still grateful for the Waldorf education he received. Currently, Ian works as a project manager for Solluna Builders in Austin Texas.

**Emma Olson (Class of 2018):** Emma attended AWS from K-12 and is a recent graduate of AWS (c/o 2018). Currently, Emma is a junior in her last year at Agnes Scott College, finishing up her prerequisites before hopefully attending Emory's school of nursing next fall!



**Eric McCune (Class of 2006):** Eric attended AWS K-12 and studied international affairs at the University of Colorado, Boulder. After working in New York City for seven years, he now resides in the Texas Hill Country with his wife, two daughters, and their kitten, and works as an account executive for software implementations.



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**Teresa O'Shaughnessy:** Teresa was a Waldorf parent at AWS from 1993 to 2008, and a kindergarten teacher there for two years. Teresa has worked with students from birth to 22 years of age who are blind and visually impaired for the past 19 years. Teresa is a biodynamic practitioner and currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Josephine Porter Institute for Applied Biodynamics.

**Ariana Zaia (Class of 2012):** Ariana Zaia graduated from the Austin Waldorf School in 2012, and went on to pursue a degree at Macalester College in Studio Art. Currently, Ariana is pursuing her MA in Art Education at the University of Texas at Austin. Ariana enjoys making ceramics from her home studio, sharing her love of making through teaching, exploring the outdoors, and dancing when the honky-tonk halls are open.



**Ben Sorrell:** Ben Sorrell has been a vibrant part of AWS community since the early '80's. Father of Annie (AWS '83-'92) and Lizzie (AWS'03); grandpa of Lulan ('26) and Amelia ('29), Ben spends his time as a commercial real estate agent, beekeeper, and a member of the AWS Board Trustee.

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**Sky Melcer (Class of 2008):** Sky was a part of the Austin Waldorf School class of 2008, attending from kinder (Sungarden) through her freshman year of high school. Sky has now worked for the school in some capacity for 11 years, and currently assists in running the AWS camp program. She is now starting her sixth year as the assistant teacher in the kindergarten (Moongarden). Sky is excited to be a part of the Alumni Council.

**Hudson Bell (Class of 2015):** Hudson attended AWS from kindergarten through 12th grade. Hudson previously owned a babysitting agency that served many families in our Waldorf community. She currently works as a Realtor in the greater Austin area.



**Jenny O'Shaughnessy (Class of 2006):** Jenny attended AWS from K-12 and has remained connected to the community since her graduation in 2006. When she isn't traveling or planning outdoor adventures, she works as a Technical Writer and a Full Spectrum Doula here in Austin.

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**Dorothy Steinle (Class of 2019):** Dorothy has been a part of various Waldorf communities, from Waldorf homeschooling to Mr. Darcy's "School On The Rise," and lastly attending the Austin Waldorf School from 6th-12th grade. She graduated in 2019 and has spent this past year delving deeper into Waldorf pedagogy as she traveled to six countries, observing at international Waldorf schools. Dorothy plans on opening Waldorf schools for Deaf children in the future, and is currently studying psychology at The University of Texas at Austin.

**Taylor Romens (Class of 2010):** Taylor attended AWS K-12 and graduated in 2010. She attended Trinity University in San Antonio, TX, where she studied Spanish and Creative Writing. After college, she moved to Santa Fe, NM, where she had a four year career with Enterprise Rent-A-Car in their Management Training Program. Three years ago, Taylor took the leap from the corporate world and began training to be a Waldorf high school teacher. Taylor now works at the Santa Fe Waldorf School, where she is a humanities teacher, art teacher, high school basketball coach, and college guidance counselor.



**Bridget O'Shaughnessy (Class of 2008):** Bridget attended AWS from K-12 and went on to become an attorney, moving back to Austin as soon as possible following her law school graduation. She is currently an Assistant District Attorney for Travis County in the Special Victims Unit where she handles child abuse cases.



# Campus Pulse

BY ASHLEIGH TOLLIVER

As the world continues to shift, the things that were once constant are changing as well. Over the last 40 years, at the peak of the summer heat, the AWS campus comes to life. The sound of children running the boardwalks returns, along with the echoing vibrations of hand-clapping games, and stories of grand traveling adventures can be heard throughout the trees. Faculty greet each other with soft-spoken enjoyment, teachers stand post at their door with arms wide open, ready and enthusiastic to begin yet another nine-month journey. These memories are a drop in the pond full of magical moments that feel like home.

Last March, AWS closed its physical doors and hastily pivoted to the cyber world. You can imagine the challenges both faculty and students have faced trying to navigate Waldorf education virtually; this challenge presented many obstacles, but thanks to the tireless work of the faculty and administration, our students have been held in a sacred space and supported through the new territory of the online world.

While we anxiously await the day when campus doors can reopen, a new kind of community, strength, and cohesiveness has begun to form. Families are finding their space in the AWS community, faculty and administrators have demonstrated passion and energy as new roles are required of them, and Alumni are stepping forward ready to help carry AWS through this unprecedented time and beyond.

*“One of the most important things you can do on this earth is to let people know they are not alone.”- Shannon L. Alder*





# What Faculty Have to Say

BY ROSA VELA SACHS

One of the benefits of working at AWS was the shared sense of community. Teaching there was not just what we did for a living, it was a place where we belonged to each other and together we strived towards a greater good. And together, we celebrated. It was during the festivals when everyone came together; from the youngest future students to great-grandparents, from full time teachers to after school tutors, from administrative staff to former board members; festivals brought us all together to mark the change of seasons. Of all the beautiful festivals celebrated, The Pumpkin Path was my favorite.

It started as the brain child of Susan Darcy, beloved games and movement teacher. Together, parents, teachers, and enthusiastic students collaborated to bring to life a magical night of fantasy peopled by witches and angels, kings and queens, two headed giants and trolls, saints and sinners. Recently, Susan and I reminisced about Pumpkin Paths past, and she agreed to let me share some of those exchanged texts here:





## 'I AM THE LIGHT'

**Rosa Vela Sachs:** When did you first think up the pumpkin path?

**Susan Darcy:** I didn't create the idea itself. I experienced something similar at Rudolf Steiner College and improvised on it when we came here to Texas. It changed with each constellation of hardworking, creative people who threw themselves into it.

**RSV:** Through the many paths we worked on, you took on so many different roles, organizer, hay hauler, fairy light installer, and then actually took on some of the roles and tableaux along the path. What is your favorite memory of it all?

**SD:** Being a witch and wearing my down coat cause it happened to be freezing cold that year, and curled up in the middle of the upper grades playground waiting for a group to come singing up from the woods so I could slowly rise and hope the moonlight made me a little bit visible in an ominous way... and creep exaggerated toward the group until someone called out "I am the light!". And then one year... I was a witch again... with Diane [Spicer] and Teresa [O'Shaughnessy]... and we all converged on one group as they came around the corner of the library. Someone called out "I am the LIGHT!" And the three of us recoiled in a dramatic way and smacked explosively against the wall of the library and slid to the ground in faux agonized groans...

**RSV:** I remember when it was over for the evening... how magical it still seemed, filled with the energy of every adult who had worked so hard to make it happen... and the spirit of the children who had gone through to live such a magic moment.

**SD:** OMG... the year Saint Francis had dysentery and kept running to the bathroom between groups!

**RVS:** Yes! I was doing the tableau right before his! He would run up to me as the group was approaching and say "Please keep them here a little longer than usual. I need to go..." That was my second year at AWS. I played a fortune teller and just about blinded everybody with my "crystal ball". LOL

**SD:** Oh! And when we needed a tableau all of a sudden (can't remember why... maybe someone cancelled last minute?)... anyway, the next thing I knew David was way high up in a tree wearing a dress and pretending to be a maiden (or an old woman?) in distress of some unknown origin...his voice was so high and silly... Hysterical!

**RVS:** I remember that! We had lost a troll at the feast; someone couldn't make it at the last moment. David came to the rescue. You didn't see him arrive because you were busy doing last minute lights or maybe lighting pumpkins along the path. Remember the time we ran out of angel guides? Tracy DiLeo had to step in suddenly.

**SD:** Yeah! That's a fun memory! Tracy was the organizer that year... she was worried when the next Angel Guide didn't show up to take the group, so she ran into the 6th grade classroom (which we used as costume storage then) and threw a skirt slip over her head with a flourish and grabbed a star wand of some random silk and made her entrance regally!

**RVS:** She surprised me! I almost forgot my lines! I wasn't there the year that Mrs. Hanelius and Miss Mary played a two headed giant... Do you remember that?

**SD:** Yes! So funny to see these tiny heads on their costume big body!

**RVS:** Remember the unicorn that was created with a horse borrowed from...

**SD:** Susan Lane?

**RVS:** Yes! It was Marcia Pirmez's idea. It was so magical, seen from a distance through the (dry ice) mist. I was a witch stationed close by that time, and one of my tasks was "dry ice courier". One of the best things for me was the anticipation we felt and the hard work we did putting it together. Then after all the fun, everyone came together still beaming from the experience (some of us bone tired too) to take it down and get the campus ready for Monday.



**RVS:** All those rotten pumpkins! I love the quirky other worldliness of it all... so much possibility... and while there were complete stories to be told at certain tableaux... the whole experience also allowed for awe and wonder of the incongruous or odd... and it didn't have to be thoroughly explained or sensical.

**RVS:** "Now we travel far and wide, following our angel guide"... What would you say was the underlying pedagogical intention or benefit in giving the students the phrase "I am the Light"? To use as a defense?

**SD:** "Here we wander far and wide..." is how I remember it. Perhaps it is an affirmation of one's divinity and power? I remember Kirsten [Sotebier, the school's first business manager] describing a time when she took her granddaughter trick-or-treating in their neighborhood. As they came to haunted house, a man leaned out the top window and was being scary...the little girl... like 4 yrs old... stopped in the middle of the side walk and called out "I AM THE LIGHT!" It took the man aback... he stopped being scary and called back... "Yes, you are little one! Yes, you are!" It seems apropos that part of the impact of saying "I am the light"... is also felt by those who hear it said... it empowers others to also be "of the light"... to recognize their own divinity and power.





# DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION AT AWS

*By: Ani Hanelius Phillips*

Last year, a group of AWS faculty and staff was formed to formally begin to tackle the issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within our school. This work has been making incremental progress over the years and we hope to bring the voice of DEI into every aspect of our school culture through making this group a formal committee. We understand that in educating our students for the future, we must be continuously working toward an honest and courageous education that does not shy away from difficult conversations. We strive for a school environment where every individual is equally valued and respected. As Waldorf educators, we hold the dignity of life and the human being at the center of our work. It is our responsibility to bear witness to what is happening in the world, to elevate the voices of marginalized people, to change the course of inequities, and to break down structural prejudice in all forms where it exists, particularly in Waldorf education.

*The Austin Waldorf School is a non-profit educational institution, 501(c)3, that welcomes students and families of any religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national or ethnic origin.*

In order to operationalize and live into such a statement, there must be skills grounded in the head, heart and hands. We not only need to welcome differences, we need to live and relate such that differences are met with respect, honor, curiosity, dignity, and equality. In order for us all to embrace this way of being, skills must be taught and growth expected.

The DEI Committee envisions a school that offers a balanced and multi-faceted curriculum which gives voices to all abilities, faiths, gender expressions, and nationalities - a school building bridges and establishing new relationships that has the emotional intelligence, spirit, and capacity to share Waldorf education with every child and every family. We believe that an inclusive and equitable environment provides a more rich educational experience for our students (in head, heart, and hands), and prepares them to meet the reality of the world in all its diversity. A diverse learning environment spurs creative thinking. When learners know to listen for multiple voices, stories, and perspectives, it helps them grow as flexible and creative thinkers. When the curriculum and pedagogical direction reflects all people, all people will be attracted to the school.

***Diversity is  
having a seat  
at the table,  
Inclusion is  
having a voice,  
Belonging is  
having that  
voice be heard.***

*- Liz Fosslien*

For more information contact: [dei@austinwaldorf.org](mailto:dei@austinwaldorf.org)

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

## *Zac Caputo and Cody Mitchell, Class of 2010*



[www.mitchellmitchellfilms.com](http://www.mitchellmitchellfilms.com)

After we graduated from AWS in 2010, Cody Mitchell and I took a gap year together before starting our freshman year of college. Now, ten years later, we work together in Denver, Colorado, for a turn-key film production company that we started ourselves. Halfway through 2018, I was two and half years into a career in Los Angeles that I was having serious doubts about, on a totally different side of the film industry. Cody was in Austin, doing freelance film work and working on producing his first feature-length film. After several long conversations, we decided to move to Colorado to be closer to the mountains that we love and open up shop in Denver.

Since then, we've produced and directed commercials and social media content for companies like Trek, Red Bull, and a handful of small, local businesses — but probably some of the most exciting work that we've done has been with other Waldorf graduates. We produced a number of videos for an outdoor apparel company started by Leo Pirmez '09 in Aspen, as well as a video with Payson McElveen '11 and Colin Strickland '05 for a tire sealant company that has sponsored Payson throughout most of his professional racing career. We've since been collaborating very closely with Payson, working on a number of projects with him, and helping grow his brand through the stories we tell with him. If you want to check out some of our work, head to our website!





# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

*Beyond the Cabins in the Woods*

## CONGRATULATIONS



*Congrats to Taylor Rubottom on her recent nuptials.*

*Pictured: The class of 2010 at her wedding in Santa Fe, New Mexico, September 2019.*

*Did you recently get married, add a new addition to your family, move across the world, or have an article published?*

We want to applaud you!

Send in your stories and pictures to

[alumni@austinwaldorf.org](mailto:alumni@austinwaldorf.org)



Myanna Webster (Hellsten), Class of 2003, was recently published in Sports Digest sharing the importance of understanding mental health in Athletes and their identity.

Myanna is a former college athlete and coach who has a passion for athlete mental health.

She is currently a counselor, working with athletes from a strength-based, solution-oriented approach to help them feel better, be better equipped to overcome obstacles and difficulties in the future, and achieve long term well being and success.

Check out her article below.

**Why Athlete Identity is an Issue**

# WALDORF TRADITIONS

## *Birthday Celebrations by Joan Olderog*

Kindergarten birthday celebrations nurture all of us. While they vary from kindergarten to kindergarten, the gatherings offer us a moment to slow down and in a gentle, reverent way to honor and appreciate the life of each little one and the gifts they bring.

Typically, the celebration follows morning outside play. The teacher calls the class, along with the parents and siblings of the birthday child, into the peaceful and subdued kindergarten room. The space is imbued with odors of beeswax candles, fresh baked muffins, colorful flowers, the wafting of silk curtains, and the circle of welcoming chairs. Once all are seated, the birthday child, donned in a special cape and crown, walks hand in hand with the teacher to their chairs. As they walk, the teacher sings a celestial song.

Next comes a variation on the story of a guardian angel and a little angel living among the sun, the moon and the stars. Eventually the little angel desires to go down the rainbow bridge to live with those they can see from up above. The guardian angel tells the little angel that she will care for the little ones wings while they are away. "Arriving" on earth, the parents name the child.

Some teachers gather information of a few events that occurred during each year of the child's life to weave into their story, individuating the telling for the child. A gift, typically handmade by the teacher, is given along with a folder of crayon drawings from each of the classmates. Joyful singing of "Happy Birthday" by all ensues and eager tummies, primed for delicious birthday muffins, head to the snack table's feast.

As an assistant in the kindergarten, as a parent of the celebrated child, and as a child once myself, this celebration always filled my being with the gentle richness and holiness of life. It filled me with appreciation for the interconnectedness of those who have come before, those who are here now, and for those yet to come down that rainbow bridge. In case you all are hungry for some yummy muffins, here is the recipe used back in the 1990's. Replace wheat flour with a gluten free flour and cow's milk with an alternative "milk" of your choice and voila, gluten free, dairy free birthday muffins. Enjoy!





# BIRTHDAY MUFFINS

## INGREDIENTS

Makes 24-30 large muffins

- 4 1/2 cups flour (1/2 cup whole wheat, 1/2 cup unbleached)
- 3 tsp baking soda
- 3 tsp baking powder
- 3 pinches of salt
- 3 cups oil
- 3 tbsp vanilla (optional)
- 2 mashed ripe bananas
- 1 1/2 cup honey
- 2 1/2 cup milk

### FROSTING

- (1) 8 oz package of softened cream cheese(or whipped cream cheese)
- Add Vanilla, honey or maple syrup to taste.

## DIRECTIONS

- 1. Preheat over to 350**
- 2. Mix first 4 ingredients and set aside**
- 3. Mix remaining ingredients and add to the dry ingredients Batter will pour like heavy cream.**
- 4. Pour into paper muffin cups or greased muffin tins (butter works well and adds flavor)**
- 5. Fill 3/4 full.**
- 6. Bake for 20 minutes.**
- 7. Check with toothpick**

**PREP TIME: 10 MIN**  
**COOK TIME: 20 MIN**  
**TOTAL TIME: 30 MIN**



# WHEN I KNEW I BELONGED

Forty years ago, 11 first graders eagerly walked through the doors of the Austin Waldorf School, paving the way for hundreds of footprints, both small and big, to follow. These footprints might never have crossed a physical path with one another, but one thing stands true: each set of footprints belongs.

This 40th year, it is time to celebrate those footprints. I want to gather and share stories that have left a footprint on your heart during your time at the Austin Waldorf School. Stories that ground you in knowing that You Belong at AWS.

Perhaps you, or a member of your family (they are after all an AWS alumni as well), have a story about:

- Creating the school sign
- Building the 3rd kindergarten
- An 8th-grade class trip that was terrifying, unifying, and now, years later, something you can laugh about
- A faculty member who spoke to your heart
- A festival, celebration, or school event:
  - Pumpkin Walk
  - Winter Fair
  - Día de los Muertos
  - Square dances
  - Pentathlon, etc
- A class play or campus 'Waldorfian' moment
- Exciting sports, choir or orchestra performance
- A class pet, campus 'friend' or lost stray turned pet
- Class occurrences that bring tears of laughter
- Or anything else you wish to reminisce about

The stories you share will be sprinkled into our community throughout the year, so make sure to check out the AWS website and Facebook page periodically to read, listen, and observe the stories that show that You Belong Here. If you have pictures that go with your story, we would love to archive these with our other pictures.

Please send your stories to [atolliver@austinwaldorf.org](mailto:atolliver@austinwaldorf.org)



# AUSTIN WALDORF SCHOOL

CELEBRATING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE  
SINCE 1980

**Our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings  
who, of themselves, are able to give purpose and direction to  
their lives.**

**~Rudolf Steiner**

## **WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!**

Your Alumni Council is here for you, but we can't be there for you without knowing what you need from us.

So spill the beans!

- What can we do to support you?
- What would you like

to see/hear from your council members, from the school,  
from the faculty, etc?

- What interests do you have with connecting to AWS?

**Keep in touch**

**Alumni@austinwaldorf.org**

**or**

**Atolliver@austinwaldorf.org**