

Jottings

The AIC / MHA Alumnae Newsletter
Fall 2013



Doing Good and Giving Back

By Melissa (McMahon) Stone '00 & '01

As the Director of Major Gifts for The Salvation Army in Indiana, I am often asked how I knew I wanted to work in nonprofit. The answer is I didn't; I never really had a plan. I never really knew what role I wanted to play. I didn't want to be a doctor, a lawyer, or a teacher; none of these occupations appealed to me. I didn't know what I wanted to do in high school, in undergrad, or even in grad school. Even today, I still don't know what I want to do when I grow up.

One day, junior year at Marian Heights Academy, I was sitting outside of Madonna Hall when a gentleman walking to the monastery stopped and asked me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I shouted out, "Successful!" That is the only plan I have ever had...

If you attended high school with me, you would probably remember me as a procrastinator. Papers were written at the last minute, plans were usually broken, and my calendar was packed with more school activities than time in the day. Keeping up that same pace 13 years later, a lot of my life has consisted of being in the right place at the right time and always being prepared. As long as I was good at what I was doing, I felt I was doing the right thing.

My senior year at Indiana University, I was hired as the receptionist of 92.3 WTTS — a local radio station. It didn't take long for me to do everything but answer the phone. That one job led to a career in radio and television. I had roles as an assistant promotions director, account execu-

tive, DJ, television host, traffic reporter, news reporter, executive producer, and more. Even after four years of being in the business, I still wasn't sure how I wanted to continue my career, so I started my MBA. My first day of class, I received some news that changed my entire life path. I was pregnant.

Pregnant. Yep, I said pregnant. If that isn't evidence of not planning ahead, I don't know what is then. Don't get me wrong, Ella Therese McMahon-Hodges was very much a wanted baby; she was just a big surprise. She made for great content on my radio shows though; she had her own theme music, the listeners loved getting the pregnancy updates, and I was even on the air from the hospital after I had her. She would come to the studio with me, get passed around from department to department, and achieved a new milestone every day. My plan at that time was just to be the best mom I could. That was my role. I was a mom with a



Mel and her husband, Lance Stone



Mel and her 2-day-old daughter, Ella

Continued

radio show. However, that plan had to change, too.

The Tuesday morning of April 22, 2008, Earth Day, plays in my mind like someone videotaped my life. I remember putting my hand on Ella's head and touching her forehead saying, "I love you, Ella Bella," and rushing out the door because I woke up late that morning. I remember perfectly the way she looked; it's a snapshot in my head. She looked so peaceful I didn't want to wake her up, so that morning I didn't kiss her goodbye.

Work was nothing out of the ordinary, just traffic and chatting, same old, same old. I remember sitting at my desk filling out the MHA alumnae update, sharing the news about my brand new baby girl, clicking submit on the web page, and looking out my fourth floor window onto Monument Circle admiring the sunrise. My work phone rang. I looked at the number on the caller ID, and I answered my phone with a smile. That smile turned to terror in an instant.

The words he was saying didn't compute... What did he mean she wasn't breathing? What happened? Was she choking? Did she just stop breathing or hadn't she breathed for hours? Where are you? What's going on? Who's there? Where is she? As everyone's lives in the newsroom carried on like business as usual, my world was falling apart. I screamed my questions into the phone, looking around like I had no idea where I was. Finally, I just dropped to my knees. In my heart I knew it was too late.

The ride to my house seemed like hours, the waiting in the lounge at the hospital seemed like days, and when the doctor put his hand on my shoulder as I was holding her little foot, pleading to Ella to wake up, I knew a lifetime was over. At that very moment, my heart shattered. My seemingly healthy, 10-week, 5-day-old baby girl was gone.

One of the nurses wrapped Ella up in a blanket, handed her to me, and walked out of the room with her head down. Ella hadn't even had a cold yet and there I am, swaying back and forth in the ER, holding my dead baby, still trying to convince myself she's sleeping. For split seconds at a time I would look down at her and forget that she wasn't with us anymore. She looked so peaceful. How could this happen? How do you put your baby to bed only to find out she'll never wake up again? Why couldn't anyone tell me what went wrong?

Because of my role on the radio, Ella's loss was very public. Hand-written letters came pouring in to the stations, and emails overloaded my inbox, while others left voicemails of support; more than 500 people attended her funeral services. Many shared with me stories of their own loss. Before this I never knew of anyone who had lost a baby, but there I was, with this opportunity to share my grief with the community and turn it in to good. That year, "An Evening for Ella and Friends" was born. Every year since, I have hosted a memorial service to remember the babies that have been lost so that we may learn from them and take the best care possible of the babies we have. The first year, the names of more than 250

babies were submitted. That number has since grown.

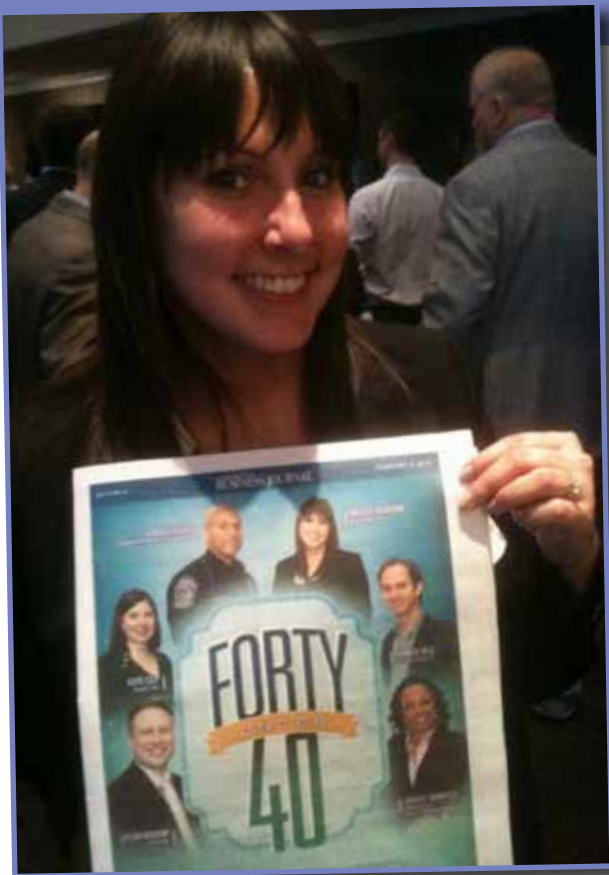
Though I was taking care of the rest of the community, I neglected to take care of myself. I didn't see a reason to wake up in the morning, and when you have to be on the radio at 5:30 AM every weekday, they really don't like you being late. After changing radio companies, counseling sessions continued, and I picked up a spokesperson gig with The Salvation Army. I met The Salvation Army through a fundraiser one of the stations I was on held annually. On their behalf, I went to schools, churches, and business meetings to share The Salvation Army story and inspire those listening to give back to the community through Salvation Army programs and services.

My spokesperson gig and executive producer job were not enough to distract me from the pain I was ignoring. Not only had I lost Ella, but her father and I ended our six-year relationship, and my friendships and family ties were strained. I'd been faking my way through life for two and a half years by this point, and I couldn't do it anymore. I quit my radio job over the phone and went to Merida, Yucatan, Mexico, to live with MHA classmates.

While in Mexico, I completed a grad school class online, took intensive



Mel poses next to The Salvation Army glove at an Indianapolis Indians game. "Most of my work in giving back to the community stems from losing Ella in 2008."



Mel makes the cover of the Indianapolis Business Journal. Last February, she received the 2013 IBJ's "Forty under 40" Award, a coveted award given to "local business and professional leaders who have achieved success and excelled in their field before the age of 40 — people who have demonstrated leadership, initiative, and dedication in pursuing their careers, and who are likely to continue to achieve in the future."

After some very intense interviews, I was hired full-time in the development department of the divisional headquarters. In this role I was able to dust off my sales and marketing background to help raise funds for The Salvation Army's programs and services. Utilizing the business relationships I formed working in radio and television and through networking, I was able to

increase corporate donations to The Salvation Army by 421% by the end of my first year. By the end of my second year we raised a record-breaking \$196,000+ in one weekend during the WIBC Radiothon for The Salvation Army Bed and Bread Club when the goal for that year was only \$150,000. This is year three, and now I am Director of Major Gifts.

As the Director, I am responsible for the overall management of corporations and individuals that share significant amounts of treasure with The Salvation Army. Was this part of the plan? No. Was anything I mentioned up to this point part of the plan? No. The only part of any plan I have ever stuck to is to be successful.

Success isn't a job title, a dollar amount in the bank, or list of letters behind your name. Success is finding the place where you are joyful and content. I am now married to the most generous man I have ever met,

Lance Stone. We met in grad school after I moved back from Mexico, live in Indianapolis, and just celebrated our one-year anniversary. In addition to my role at The Salvation Army, I still work in radio part-time and host shows on 93.1 WIBC, Country 97.1 HANK FM, and B105.7. I regularly consult organizations locally and nationally whose missions involve preventing infant loss. And by the time you read this, I will have joined the alumnae board of Marian Heights Academy, a school whose influence is never understood by outsiders.

At last check, the word success was in the top 1% of looked up definitions on merriam-webster.com. Why are so many people looking up the definition of success? I think it is because everyone tries to measure their success against someone else's definition. Author, businessman, consultant, and educator Nido Qubein said, "Winners compare their achievements with their goals, while losers compare their achievements with those of other people." My only consistent plan and goal is to be successful. What's yours?

Melissa (McMahon) Stone was in the final graduating class of the Academy the summer of 2000. She was one of five members of the class of 2001 who elected to take summer courses offered by the Academy to give them the credits needed for graduation and to earn a diploma from the school.

Spanish classes, and volunteered at a Salvation Army orphanage. What was supposed to be a 10-day trip turned into just under three months. Like I said, plans change, but something else changed. I changed. My trip to Mexico is what I needed to see that I was going to be okay. Even though I didn't have Ella, I was still a mom. I still had a chance to do good things for this world and give back. I didn't have to fake it anymore. If I was having a bad day, I could have a bad day. If I was having a great day, I could help others have a great day. I made the choice to start healing.

When I returned to Indianapolis, I continued my spokesperson role with The Salvation Army and continued my grad school classes. My Master's in Business Administration had one too many accounting classes so I switched to a Master's in Public Administration with a concentration in nonprofit management, failing to notice that I still had to take the same accounting classes. In the meantime, I was challenged with a non-compete clause in my last radio contract so I needed something to fill my time and pay the bills. Coincidentally, The Salvation Army needed a Corporate Relations Coordinator.

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Sister Paulette Seng, Editor
pseng@thedome.org • 802 E. 10th Street
Ferdinand, Indiana 47532-9239

AIC/MHA Alumnae News



Class of 1956 members gathered at the home of Clara Mae (Schnell) Messmer in Jasper, Indiana, in May. Left to right: Carol (Hoffman) Knies, Mary Ann Witte, Rosie (Blume) Bartley, Mary Longtine, OSB, Mary Ann Schepers, OSB, Mary C. (Hering) Schrader, Joyce Schindler, Alice Gronotte, OSB, Clara Mae (Schnell) Messmer, Kathryn Huber, OSB, Barbara Bauer Roach, Mary Agnes Sermersheim, OSB.

Janie (Spahn) Nunning '58 and husband, Bernie, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a Mass of Thanksgiving at their parish in September. They also spent several days of celebration at Gatlinburg, Tennessee, in July with their children and grandchildren. They have 4 children and 10 grandchildren. Congratulations, Janie and Bernie!

Kathy (Bohm) Boink '58 and Jerry Seng were married on September 7 at St. Benedict's church in Evansville. Congratulations, Kathy and Jerry!

Kathy (Ziliak) Hollander '59 and husband, Ron, were married November 23, 1963. In honor of their 50th anniversary, they, along with their four children and spouses, made a commitment to be a Partner Build Sponsor for a new Habitat house in Evansville. "We have been blessed in life and wanted to do something meaningful and permanent to celebrate our marriage," said Kathy.

Interested in finding out what other alums are doing? Join the Official Alumni Group on Facebook!



Search for "Marian Heights Academy/Academy Immaculate Conception Official Alumni Group"

You can also visit the Sisters' Facebook page at [facebook.com/Ferdinand OSB](https://www.facebook.com/FerdinandOSB). You do not need a Facebook account to see the information posted on their page!

"We like that Habitat is an organization that helps people help themselves. So with the help of Sister Jane Michele McClure, Major Gifts Officer for Habitat for Humanity of Evansville [and Ferdinand Benedictine], the University of Evansville has also committed to being a Partner Build Sponsor on this house. We appreciate that other family and friends are contributing, and are optimistic that the full cost of \$80,000 for the Build will soon be achieved. Plans are that the home will be completed in December so the Partner Family can move into their new home before Christmas. The motto for our Hollander Anniversary Build is Building a Marriage: Building a Home." Congratulations, Kathy and Ron, and may God bless your generosity.

Marilyn (Scheller) Hirsch '69 said she wasn't able to attend the reunion this summer because she was on a family vacation at Myrtle Beach. "I do plan on attending next year for our 45th! Even though I'm retired, I'm really busy with grandkids, volunteering at St. Philip's (Jr. Legion of Mary, funeral dinner leader and Hospitality Committee), and also Fred and I started a non-profit organization — Friends of Harmonie State Park (New Harmony, Indiana). I do enjoy what I do so it's worth being busy all of the time!"

Kathy Ellison, AKA Kate Nixon, MHA teacher 1990-96 "My book, *The Heirloom Pearls*, is now available on Amazon as a paperback and Kindle. I'm working on my second book. The working title is *The Garnet Brooch*."

Angela (Dickson) Ngigi '98 "I have three girls now, ages 3, 4 and 8. I had no idea we graduated 15 years ago until I received your e-mail. It would be super cool to do another cookout. That was really fun last time (in 2003) and it was awesome to see former teachers. MHA was a very special high school, and I was really blessed to be able to attend."

Kendall Gecsei '98 married John Doogan on July 20. Congratulations, Kendall and John! We wish you many years of happiness. Kendall is an educator at Knox County Schools in Knoxville, Tennessee.

We welcome news from our alums!

Please submit updates about yourself for the 2014 spring issue of *Jottings*. Send via e-mail (pseng@thedome.org), or U.S. postal service (address on back cover of *Jottings*), or the "news link" on the bottom of the alumnae web page (thedome.org/alumnae).

Deadline for news for the spring issue is January 20, 2014.

Former Academy business manager elected prioress



Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz smiles after being installed as prioress of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in a special ceremony held in Monastery Immaculate Conception Church on July 13.

ing humanity through your professions. You have embodied the values we shared during our Academy days. We are humbled and grateful for all of you.

“Last spring I was in North Carolina, and I met Barbara (Belford) Tucker. Who would have thought that hundreds of miles away I’d be talking with a 1948 Academy graduate about her Academy days. We visited at her parish. You would never have known that she is in her 80’s. She is one of the most active members there and is as excited about life today as she was 65 years ago. Our visit showed me that across the years and miles we hold a bond between us that can never be broken.”

Sister Barbara Lynn shared her confidence about the sisters’ future.

“What is most important in our future is that we believe in our call. We have been brought together for God’s purpose. As long as we live out our Benedictine vocation, we will be fine.

“And we have wonderful partners throughout the country — alumnae, Oblates, volunteers, donors, people attending our spirituality programs, and those being served by our ministries — who believe in what we’re doing and support us. I feel confident when we listen to the Spirit and walk forward together.

“I’m happy and excited and look forward to the next six years of growing in our spiritual life together. I thank you all for your support, and I ask for your prayers.”

For a detailed article about Sister Barbara Lynn, check the online version of the sisters’ magazine *Seek. Pray. Share.* at thedome.org/publications.

After days of prayerful discernment and reflection, as individuals and total community, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand elected Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz as their prioress for the next six years.

“I felt called by God to accept the position of prioress and knew the Spirit would be with me and guide me,” she said.

Because Sister Barbara Lynn served as business manager at Marian Heights Academy from 1981 to 1989, she feels a special bond with the alumnae.

“When I entered the monastery at Ferdinand, I came on a Saturday night, and on Monday morning, I became the Academy business manager. My first ministry with the Benedictine sisters was with you! I loved those days. Whether it was chaperoning trips, student bank hours, or taking study hall, I loved it and loved you.

“When we hear from you and when you come back for visits and reunions and share your lives with us, we feel proud of you and what you are doing. You share your faith. You are good parents. You are achieving success and serv-

May they rest in peace

Alumnae: LaVerne Mary (Hoefling) Sims ’33, Suzanne (Florence) Jaent ’38, Sister Johnette (Mary Catherine) Finis ’39, Martha (Hentz) Hoefling ’39, Sister Mary Judith Howe ’41, Dorothy (Askins) Willett ’43, Luella (Schum) Shanahan ’45, Rita (Meyer) Gehlhausen ’47, Mary Louise (Mattingly) Aldridge ’48, Anna (DeHon) Williams ’48, Rita K. (Rexing) Wilson ’52, Martha (Banet) Moore ’60, Nancy (Messel) Hildenbrand ’61, Catherine “Katie” Schwenk ’67, Sister Michelle Willett (faculty 1995-2000)

Husband of: Mary Ann (Folz) Nichols ’56

Mother of: Marilyn (Richardt) Evans ’60, Bonnie (Zint) Ambrose ’63, Rita (Barwe) Steinkamp ’63, Rita Rae (Elpers) Beckley ’67, Mimi Hoefling ’75, Lindsie (Jung) Fransen ’01

Sister of: Sister Mary George (Barbara) Kissel ’41, Sister Maria Tasto ’55, Cynthia (Fleck) Schum ’65, Linda (Kreilein) Schuck ’68, Brenda (Fleck) Mason ’74

Brother of: Sister Benita (Margaret) Biever ’37, Sister Mary Alice Schnur ’40, Patricia (Clark) Hurley ’45, Dorothy (Dottie) Clark ’48, Bonnie (Gehlhausen) Emmert ’48, Sister Theresine (Mary Rose) Will ’48, Mary Ann (Hormuth) Wiggers ’51, Anna Lee (Hormuth) Haas ’53, Betty Jo (Hormuth) McCabe ’60, Kay (Kavanaugh) Andres ’61, Judy (Will) Vogler ’61, Elaine (Will) Pokorney ’63, Shirley (Hirsch) Myers ’67, Charlotte (Kavanaugh) Lewinski ’69, Marye Pat (Maurer) Skinner ’72, Susan Day ’78, Gretchen Logue-Stevens ’80, Carolyn Day ’81

Daughter of: Joan (Sieg) Seipel ’45, Donna (Will) Wrinkles ’63

Alumnae relive 'priceless memories' at reunion

Our annual alumnae reunion is behind us, but the memories remain. "The memories we relive each time we return to the hill are priceless," commented Elaine (Fromme) Robertson '80.

Around 150 alums and guests returned to the hill on June 29-30 to reconnect with their friends from their Academy years. This year the Alumnae Board arranged a "gathering space" — the MHA gym — for those who came on Saturday. That seemed to be well received by a good number of alums, young and old, who "hung out" there Saturday afternoon.

"I had a wonderful time Saturday afternoon, so I do hope you keep doing this. It enabled me to have longer and more relaxed conversations with people." Nanette Bulebosh '76 and faculty member

"I and my family had such a wonderful time those two days. So wonderful to see so many familiar (and always friendly) faces." Amy (Hermann) Lawson '93

On Sunday, following Mass and dinner, newly elected president of the Alumnae Board, Tina Dalton, conducted the business meeting. All the anniversary classes from 1938 to 1998 were represented at the class roll call. The class of 1953 had the highest attendance with 22. One of that class, Shirley (Love) Chiello, came from New Mexico to celebrate with her classmates. Shirley won the prize given to the person who traveled the farthest to the reunion. The classes of 1958 and 1963 gave class donations to the Sisters of St. Benedict. Tina thanked Janie (Spahn) Nunning '58 for serving as Board president the past four years and presented her with a gift of handmade jewelry Tina had made. Sister Paulette Seng '59 introduced the sisters' new prioress, Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, to the alumnae. (see page 5 for a message from Sister Barbara Lynn.) Attendance prizes were given to Jillian Healey (young daughter of Lindsey (Moorman) Healey '01), Geneva (Stumler) Boone '63, and Sister Mary Louise (Gloria) Uebelhor '60.

Some alums made great effort and sacrifice to attend the reunion. Jennifer (Gazda) DeHennes '93 wrote a few days

before the weekend, "I'm trying to plan with my family for going to the reunion. I have been ill and didn't think I could make the trip because of my chemotherapy schedule. But that was changed and I think I can come. It's a five-hour drive but I am very excited about coming. Can't wait to be on the hill again and see classmates and teachers. Unfortunately, I can't stay after dinner because I have to get labs done that evening for my chemo treatment on Monday."

After returning home from the weekend, many alums posted on Facebook their thoughts of the reunion.

"Madame President and Alumnae Board, you put on an awesome Sunday gathering, from Fr. Sean's singing at Mass, to the great raffle, to the yummy desserts! How wonderful to see all you lovely young ladies who returned to the hill. Abrazos! *Julie (Uebelhor) Buechler '76 and faculty member*

"Thanks to everyone! There was a time when we wondered fearfully how we would manage after MHA closed. But we have come together in a wonderful way. It does my heart good! I look forward to every year!" *Sarah Tucker '81*

"The years melted away as we chased memories. Exploring the grounds of MHA, transcending time, giggling uncontrollably, we once again became Academy girls...we'll always be Highlanders." *Pam (Anderson) Stamps '82*

"Thanks to all the sisters who continue to support us and pray for us. They always extend such a warm welcome to us. Cannot wait to return." *Elaine (Fromme) Robertson '80*

"We sisters welcome your visits throughout the year, not only at the summer reunion, and we greatly appreciate all the support we receive from our alumnae." *Sister Paulette Seng '59 and faculty member*

*Spread the word and mark your calendars for **next year's gathering on June 28-29, 2014**. Classes ending with 4 or 9 in their graduating year will celebrate special anniversaries. Start planning now!*





Class of 1953



1978



1983



Class of 1958



Class of 1988



Class of 1993



Class of 1963

*"Our class had a great turnout. We saw some girls that we had not seen since high school. Glad they were all able to make our 50th."
—Mary Jane (Eckerle) Blessinger '63*



Class of 1998



Class of 1968

View more photos from the Alumnae Reunion on the Sisters' SmugMug page!
<http://thedome.smugmug.com/MonEvents/Alumnae-Reunion-2013/>



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AIC/MHA Alumnae Association

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Sisters of St. Benedict Spirituality Ministry

Feeling like you need to re-energize or renew your body and spirit? Consider one of the upcoming programs offered by the sisters' Spirituality Ministry at Kordes Center. For more information visit the sisters' website at thedome.org/programs, or call 812-367-1411, ext. 2915

- **October 19, 2013** — “A Day Apart: Rest and Reflection”

Spend some reflective time to just “be” alone with your God. Step away from your busy life and stroll the monastery grounds, doing whatever nourishes your heart and soul.

- **November 2, 2013** — “Exploring the Well of Grief”

Loss comes in many forms: death of a loved one, illness, separation or divorce, unemployment, etc. Something has been taken from us and we grieve. We will explore the grief we carry and find healthy ways to express it.

- **November 9, 2013** — “Enneagram”

Learn the essential components of this personality theory and the types of compulsions developed to cope with our human reality. This workshop will help you better understand your personal and spiritual growth.

