

# Jottings

The AIC / MHA Alumnae Newsletter  
Fall 2014



## Alum grateful for life-changing journey

Written by Amy (Conrey) Andreas '90

Have you ever had one of those moments when everything seems to be going great in your life, but suddenly, for whatever reason...you're ready for a change? About 14 years ago my future husband and I decided we were ready for a change. Besides getting engaged, we also made a significant decision to quit our steady jobs in education and community social work and to relocate from Cincinnati, Ohio, to the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana. Everyone we knew thought we had lost our minds.

Armed with our master's degrees and a lot of inspiration, we moved in 2001, arriving right before 9/11. As we watched the events of that horrific day unfold, I remember thinking, "Wow, if the world is coming to an end, we've certainly picked a nice place to be." Thankfully, the world didn't end, but it did certainly change, and I am grateful for each step taken on this 14-year journey.

Marian Heights instilled in us the belief that we could do anything, and that we should do everything we can to help others and ourselves lead the lives God has planned for us. Little did I realize at that time what God had planned for me.

Located in the northwestern portion of Montana, the Blackfeet Reservation borders Glacier National Park and Alberta, Canada. My husband and I had arranged to rent a house in the sleepy little mountain town of East Glacier (pop. 363) on the reservation. We had accepted jobs with Browning Public Schools located 13 miles away in the reservation hub town of Browning.

Coming from a large city to a small, remote area was a bit of an adjustment to say the least. The house we rented had recently been converted from a garage into a small, one-bedroom, one-bath house – quite different from our house in Cincinnati. A roundtrip to the grocery store took three hours, in good weather. The wind was extreme. It blew several railroad cars off the bridge into the river shortly after we arrived. It snowed before school even started. Large animals (grizzlies, mountain lions, and other dangerous animals) wandered around our "yard." We didn't have a key to our house and never felt the need to lock our car. We had about two weeks to adjust to our new surroundings before the school year began.



Amy and her daughter, Maya, enjoy hikes in the mountains.

I was excited to learn about a new culture and to live and work in a place that was completely foreign to me. I thought of it as a nice, little domestic Peace Corps experience for a year or two. I didn't know at the time how much this place would change me.

I was hired as the reading specialist at the middle school on the outskirts of Browning. The small building was surrounded by a metal fence with barbed wire. There was a herd of horses munching on the weed-covered lawn the first time I saw it. Apparently, the school

*Continued*

didn't have windows until the previous year. It certainly didn't look like any school I had taught at before.

On our first day of teacher orientation, the entire district gathered in the high school gymnasium. I remember I was impressed that the Chief of the Blackfoot Tribe had come to welcome the teachers, and then to my surprise, a drum group assembled. The large, crowded room quickly became silent as several young men and a couple of older women quietly gathered around the drum. I had never witnessed a drum group before and had no idea what to expect. Everyone stood. With the first definitive slap of the drum, and the high-pitched cry of the first note, what I heard and literally felt took my breath away. I realized, with every penetrating beat of the drum, that we were very, very far from home.

If you've ever visited the Blackfoot Reservation or Glacier National Park, you have no doubt witnessed the extreme beauty and ruggedness of the landscape. Over the years I have discovered that this beauty and strength is reflected in the people (Amskapi Pikuni) who have considered this place home for thousands of years. Although the reservation is now considered home to many of the Blackfeet, the 1.5 million acres is only a tiny allotment of their original territory.



*Amy encourages one of the students working on a project in the library.*

Aware of some of their history, I knew that as a white woman from outside the reservation and working in the field of education, I wouldn't exactly be welcomed. I didn't blame them. Among innumerable and unspeakable

atrocities, Blackfeet children, like many other Indian children across the US and Canada in the 1800s and later, were removed from their homes and families and forced to attend

boarding schools. Their hair was cut. They couldn't wear traditional clothes or participate in any traditional cultural activities and were forbidden from speaking their language. All of these "educational" and assimilation policies enacted over 100 years ago continue to have lasting and devastating impacts on this and other Native communities.

Understandably, the Blackfoot Reservation community is wary of outsiders. Traditionally, people came here, as the Blackfeet joke, "trying to save the Natives." Inevitably, they couldn't handle the weather and isolation and packed up their bags and left. I remember during my first week of teaching, someone offered this advice, "If you stick around for more than a year or two, the kids will start to trust you." They were right. It was tremendously challenging at first, but the larger educational needs of the community have always helped to keep me focused.

The approximately 2,000 students served in this school district (K-12) face many challenges. On the reservation, 40% of families live below the federal poverty level (2012 US Census) and 98% of students are eligible for the Federal Lunch Program. The average per capita income is \$9,769. Persistent unemployment (72%) and lack of education (37% of tribal members between ages 18 and 25 do not have a high school diploma) significantly affect the



*Amy is surrounded by students gathered in the library.*

health and well-being of our students and their families. More than one fifth of our students fit the description of "homeless," yet we no longer have a homeless shelter in Browning.

The extreme isolation of the reservation compounds these problems. Often community members have to make the hard choice to leave the reservation in order to find better opportunities. Students and families feel torn between searching out educational or economic opportunities and leaving friends, family, and culture behind.

My first few days of school, I was amazed at how much my students were just like students all over the country. Personable, goofy, loud, rambunctious, and intelligent. But unlike my students back home, all of my assigned students struggled to read. Some had obvious learning and developmental disabilities, diagnosed and undiagnosed. Some students simply had horrific attendance. Perfectly intelligent and capable, they just had never attended school regularly enough in order to learn to read.

I discovered that most of them have good reasons for their bad attendance and poor reading skills: they are the oldest at home in charge of younger brothers and sisters or cousins; their grandma or grandpa is sick and they worry what will happen to them; they are hungry; they couldn't sleep because they were cold; they are sick or caring for a sick loved one; they are on drugs; they don't have a "home" and sleep in a different place each night...



I don't mean to perpetuate stereotypes. There are many "normal" children growing up with absolutely wonderful families on the reservation. But it is a simple fact that many of my students do not have stable home environments. Yet, over the years I have seen many work hard against all odds and become successful readers, graduate, and move on. I have also seen some throw desks across the room, leave screaming in a barrage of curse words and tears, never to return. It breaks my heart, but yet I stay.

Since moving to the reservation, I have attended a lot of funerals. Suicide and car wrecks claim a disproportionate amount of lives on this reservation. Simply as a means of survival, religion and faith are a big part of this community. All the local churches have found a way of blending traditional Blackfeet culture and beliefs with that of Christianity. At first I was surprised by how different the Catholic Church was. The priest wore beaded vestments, the music was different, the church was noisy, the sign of peace took about five minutes. Everyone in the room was certain to shake your hand or welcome you at some point during the Mass.

One day, just feeling completely overwhelmed with the beauty of the Mass, I started to cry. Just a few tears. Unprepared, I was wiping the tears away with my hand when an elder behind me reached forward and extended a Kleenex, saying, "Sometimes that's just what the Holy Spirit will do to you."

Every once in a while there will be reason for a special Mass, such as the canonization of Algonquin-Mohawk Kateri Tekakwitha, the first American Indian woman to be canonized by the Church. When Father combines the usual beautiful Mass with drumming, traditional singing, and the burning of sweetgrass, oh my...watch out...here comes that Holy Spirit again!

Traditionally, the Blackfeet were known as the raiders of the plains, and all the Northwestern tribes were afraid of them. I have discovered that this reputation still exists. After living in Montana for a while, I was shocked by how much racism and how many misconceptions are still prevalent

regarding the Blackfeet and other Native communities. Whenever someone from off the reservation finds out where I live, they say, "Oh that must be so scary!" And then they share some ridiculous story they've heard about life on the rez.

Although, there are social and economic problems that cannot be ignored, I have found the Blackfeet to be friendly, kindhearted, loving people with a tremendous sense of humor. Life may be hard all around them but they love to tease, laugh, and joke around. They know the healing powers of laughter. Their families have tremendously strong bonds, and there are many different and active faith communities.

There is a strong resurgence of the traditional Blackfeet culture within the community. Many families carry on traditions practiced for hundreds, maybe thousands of years. If you are lucky, you might be invited to participate in a "sweat" or attend a bundle opening, Sundance, or other special ceremony.

But the Blackfeet do not give their traditions away. You earn the right to participate. It is ironic, that the schools, once the greatest enemy, are now the biggest participants in promoting Native language acquisition and the study and preservation of Blackfeet history and culture. As much as they legally can, the district blends the traditional ways into the structure of the public school system. As a result, every year we see more and more students graduate, pursue higher education degrees, and then return home to help their communities. We can only hope this trend continues.

I can't help but think of my teachers and mentors at Marian Heights as I work with my students here. MHA prepared us to take the unconventional route and to serve and work for others. MHA provided an environment where we students could develop our unique gifts and insights through reflection, service, and intellectual inquiry. We were challenged to engage in the world and become women in the service of others, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. I'm so grateful for that foundation of service and faith.



*Amy and her husband, Jason, accompany their daughter, Maya, to her first day of kindergarten.*

There are many evenings, driving home from work, looking out at the massive peaks of Glacier and the Rocky Mountain front, that I cannot believe my good fortune. I cannot believe that I get to live here, working with some of the most resilient students in the nation, in one of the most fascinating, faith-filled cultural communities, surrounded by the most scenic terrain in the lower 48!

Recently, one of my former students was working with some documentary filmmakers and was trying to describe what is so special about this place and why he loves it. As he stammered around, he finally came out with the line that ended up as the title for their film – "It's where God likes to be." I have to agree, and that is why I continue to be committed to this community.

[The filmmakers will show *Where God Likes to Be* at New Orleans Film Festival this fall!]

*Originally from New Harmony, Indiana, Amy Andreas now lives with her husband and daughter in East Glacier Park on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana. She has worked as a reading and library media specialist in the Browning Public Schools on the reservation and is now head librarian at the high school.*

## AIC/MHA Alumnae News

**Mary Lou (Hoffman) Tretter '58** and her husband celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in June. Congratulations Mary Lou and Linus!

**Doris (Giesler) Chandler '59**  
 "I am sorry to say that our 55th anniversary reunion will have to go on without me. My husband and I have scheduled a British Isles Princess cruise during that time with three other couples, and it would be difficult to cancel. I will think of you all, however, as I'm kissing the blarney stone in Ireland that day! Have a joyous reunion! It would be impossible not to have fun, being surrounded with such a good, solid group of people."

**Charlotte (Kavanaugh) Lewinski '69** "I am in Alaska right now [August 28]. Guess who walked up to our table last night and said 'I know you.' **Mary (Lueken) Messmer** and her husband, Tom! Unbelievable! We hadn't seen each other in over 20 years! God is good!" [Mary and Charlotte are classmates.]

**Angela Eisele '79** "Thanks to whoever sends me the *Jottings* newsletter. And tell the class of 1979 that if they're ever in the DC area, or want to visit the area, I will always have space in my home for them. They may also be interested to know that **Kim Kruis '79** and I remain best friends, and Kim says hi." Angela lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

**Marianne Butler '85** recently won her primary election for Louisville Metro Council member, and with no opposition this fall, will begin a third term on the Council, representing District 15. She has served as the budget chair for the past four years. Her brother Denny currently serves as a Kentucky State Representative.

**Amy (Cates) Ruesewald '85** and her husband, Fritz, have four children – Jude (getting married this fall), Elizabeth (studying physical therapy at Texas Women's College), Zachary (a freshman in college), and Emily (a sophomore in high school). Amy and her husband live in New Waverly, Texas, and continue to deal with her health issues following a life-changing stroke nearly three years ago. She



Amy Ruesewald and Marianne Butler returned to "the hill" last February for a visit with Sister Jane Ann Breen (at left) and others.

recently underwent heart surgery to place a stent in one artery. She is thankful for the many prayers and much support from family and friends.

**Kate Grote '89** in response to a reunion reminder: "What a nice surprise to hear that our 25th reunion is coming up! I wish I could help as a class representative but we've just had our fifth child in January and my brain is still quite mushy. I'm doing a lot of juggling, but I'm definitely going to try to make it there in June."

**Kristi (Eckert) Menke '89** "I won't be able to attend the 25th anniversary of our class reunion because we will be out of town that weekend celebrating our 15-year wedding anniversary. We were married June 26, 1999."

**Roberta Webb-Miljure '89** from Anchorage, Alaska, responded to an email sent to anniversary classes regarding the summer reunion. "I'm not certain that I can make it to the reunion this summer, as much as I would love to. I can't believe it has been 25 years since we graduated! MHA is one of the most special places and times of my life, so it pains me to say I can't make it. I work full time and have a lot going on with beginning a partial home remodel. I nearly had a

mama meltdown realizing my son is going to be 18 this year and a senior in high school."

**Amy Conrey Andreas '90** "I am indebted to MHA...great teachers and great memories, and my experience with you all certainly changed my life for the better. I think of you all and the friends I made at MHA, and I am so grateful to have had a chance to attend and graduate from such an inspiring school."

**Katherine Baird Caskey '94** works as a non-profit development professional. "I moved to South Florida with my family in spring 2013. It has been a change for us from Chicago. My parents, sister, and brother-in-law have been down here for a number of years. Now we have joined them in 'paradise.' I have a 1-year-old daughter, Sofia. My parents are happy to have us all close now. I don't keep in touch with many alums because I am not on Facebook, but I do hear from some of the gals in Mexico. I lived there in the early 2000s."

**Greta Naylor '98** Congratulations to Greta and Gerald Parks who were married this past March in Dearborn, Michigan!

**We welcome updates and news from our alums.** Please send us items about yourself or other Academy alumnae (with their permission) that we can publish in *Jottings*. Send via e-mail ([pseng@thedome.org](mailto:pseng@thedome.org)), or U.S. postal letter (address on back cover of *Jottings*), or the "news link" on the bottom of the alumnae web page ([thedome.org/alumnae](http://thedome.org/alumnae)).

## 2014 Alumnae Reunion Remarks

*Mel (McMahon) Stone '01 (Alumnae Board Member), Indiana* “Great to see so many alumnae having such a great time...another fun reunion weekend! On Saturday alums gathered at MHA gym, sharing stories from the various classes. Sunday we broke bread and met new friends. The raffle was a huge success, and many people went home with wonderful items donated by the board and other alumnae.”

In her letter to classmates of '49, *Sister Mary Claude Croteau* said: “As difficult as it is to believe, it's time to celebrate the 65th anniversary of our graduation from the Academy. Getting older is slowing us down physically, but I doubt that our spirit of togetherness has lessened. We have always been known by the number of us who are counted on Alumnae Day. Let's not quit now! I look forward to seeing as many of you as can come. For those who won't be here, please send a note to share during our meal together — in that way we will be united.”



*Left: The sister alums from the Benedictine monastery at Beech Grove, Indiana, couldn't make the reunion at Ferdinand but had their own get-together, “looking at yearbooks and remembering old times and old friends.”*

A committee for the 50th anniversary class met several times during the year to make

their reunion plans. Their letter to classmates concluded with a challenge: “We hope that you can be with us for this very special occasion in 2014. We want our group to be the largest group that has ever gathered for the reunion. To make that happen, you need to be there!”

### *Comments from anniversary celebrants:*

“After 20 years, it was as if no time had passed since we left.” — *class of '94: Alisa Dickson, Tara Gannon, and Melissa McClain*

“It was great to visit all the old friends on alumnae weekend. We are all so blessed to be in our class and have friends for 55 years and more.” — *Angie (Dolan) Simmons '59, Kansas*

“Thank you for all the work you and your cohorts did to make the reunion a delightful time for everyone. I'm so glad I decided to make the trip.” — *Sina Hollis Murphy '59, Pennsylvania*

“When I think of our group, it's like we grew up together.” — *Sharon (Jahn) Cavanaugh '59, Florida*

“You laugh, you cry, you eat great food, play trivia games, share pictures, reminisce, and make new friends. You connect again with the sisters. They love to hear about our lives

Note the joy and vitality of our summer reunion.  
See reunion photos on SmugMug:

<http://thedome.smugmug.com/Events/Alumnae-Reunion-images/Alumnae-Reunion-2014/>

just as we do theirs. Seeing my classmates brought special memories of lasting friendships made long ago at ‘the Castle on the Hill’. I feel so blessed to have this wonderful group of women in my life!” — *Kathy (Walter) Koch '64, Indiana*

“Rumors are that the ‘noisy’ class of '64 might be asked to gather in a soundproof room during future Alumnae Weekends. We laugh, reminisce, joke, and finish one another's sentences — all simultaneously. Somehow, all of us became best friends during these past 50 years.” — *Kathy (Beckman) Ziliak '64, Indiana*

“Returning refreshes and soothes me. Those four years were a great blessing and helped me in so many ways. I will be forever grateful to all of you for opportunities I've had because of my four years with you.” — *Linda (Little) Wending '64, Indiana*

“As a ‘quasi-alumnae’ — one who attended AIC my freshman and sophomore years only — I try to get back for as many reunions as possible. Our 50th this year was especially important. The friendships I made at AIC have endured time. Beyond the light-hearted fun, the tranquility and peace that seeps into your being while visiting ‘the Castle on the Hill’ is well worth the drive.” — *Maura (Flannagan) Watson '64, Georgia*

“I came back for our 45th anniversary because I had not made it back in almost 20 years. I had a sense that I was missing out on seeing people who had been so important to me. I had so much fun on Saturday and Sunday. The stories have gotten better with age! The feelings of peace and joy that I left with were so worth the trip!” — *Charlotte (Kavanaugh) Lewinski '69, Missouri*

“One thing that amazes me at reunions is how alums always remember each other in a positive way.” — *Louise (Schessele) Elpers '69, Indiana* [from a poem Louise wrote for her class] “Cliques that sometimes used to be/ have turned into the ‘click’ now in my knee!/I'm no longer as fast or mobile or the beauty I used to be/ yet I am able, with both eyes, to see!... Wonderful teachers you were to us/holding us together, tight as glue./Seeing us through our teenage years, you loved us and taught us, too!...”

“Every time I drive up ‘the Hill’, I feel a peace I don't get anywhere else. The world is changing, and life is stressful. Everyone deserves a moment of ‘home’ to refresh the soul. The joy we had this year was amazing!” — *Tina Dalton '82 (Alumnae Board Member), Indiana*

### Just the facts

At least 120 alumnae and their guests were present over the reunion weekend. Only 4 of the 13 anniversary classes did not have members in attendance. The 50th anniversary class of 1964 gave a class gift of \$785 to the Sisters of St. Benedict. Their class also had the highest attendance with 16. Nicole (Beck) Beavin '70 traveled the farthest, coming from San Antonio, Texas.



### Anniversary classes





## News from the Hill

### Two sisters make religious profession



Sister Jane Ann

Sister Jane Ann Breen made her temporary profession of monastic vows as a Sister of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in July.

Sister Jane Ann, who was a member of the Sisters of St. Benedict community until 2003, taught in the Academy from 1972-74 and 1981-95 and then served as principal there from 1995-1999.

### May they rest in peace

**Alumnae:** Sister Mary Herbert (Mary Lucille) Walsh '33, Sister Mary Charlotte (Josephine) Kavanaugh '34, Margaret 'Peggy' (Zeyen) Blackwell '40, Jessie (Yeager) McConnell '40, Mildred E. (Lutz) Roethemeier '44, Mary Frances (Spencer) Jarboe Montgomery '46, Mary Elizabeth (Gasser) Borman '50, Jane R. (Bowling) Gariety '50, Mary Eileen (Mooney) Eubanks '53, Norma (Baehl) Goedde '53, Alberta (Koberstein) Elpers '54, Sister Maria Tasto '55, Cheryl (Burst) Freeman '64, Betty Ann (Elpers) Strickland '65, Teresa Jalocha-Hale '96, Sister Mary Esther Steckler (Principal 1962-67)

**Husband of:** Dorothy (Linne) Hall '49, Mary Jo (Rupprecht) Schaefer '54

**Father of:** Dinah (Schatz) Schum '75, Leigh Ann Mehling '88

**Mother of:** Rosie (Blume) Bartley '56, Jeanette (Blume) Becher '57, Mary Celine (Meyer) Conroy '57, Margie (Meyer) Alvey '59, Marilyn (Richardt) Evans '60, Sister Patricia McGuire '60, Phyllis (Blume) Lilly '61, Carole (Blume) Tabor '64, Roberta (Blume) Miller '65, Martha (Krempp) Beckman '69, Ann (Emge) Northern '70, Jeanne (Krempp) Campbell '71

**Son of:** Shirley (Love) Chiello '53, Karrie Azure '92

**Sister of:** Sister Assunta Highbaugh '33, Sister Mary Leah Baehl '49, Sister Donna Marie Herr '63

**Brother of:** Sister Mary Leah Baehl '49, Mary (Loepker) Burger '50, Mary Sue (Melton) Quigley '64, Sister Linda Bittner '65, Florence (Schmitt) Ward '65, Helen (Melton) Gibson '66, Julia (Gehlhausen) Thomas '66, Jeanette Melton '69, Karen (Gehlhausen) Summers '69, Jane (Bittner) Swingle '69, Rico N Elaina (Billy) Fielder '96

About her return to the monastery in January of this year, she said, "I returned home." Since then, she has assisted in various ministries at the monastery and became re-acquainted with the community and the monastic life in preparation for professing her monastic vows. Currently, she works at the monastery in support services, tutors at the Guadalupe Center in Huntingburg, and is an instructor for the Red Cross and for Ivy Tech (Madison Campus), teaching online courses in sociology and multi-cultural studies.

Sister Rachel Geracitano, a native of Louisville, also made her temporary profession of monastic vows as a Sister of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in July.

A graduate of Bellarmine University in Louisville, Sister Rachel entered the Ferdinand monastery in 2012. In addition to her initial formation program and classes in preparation for her profession, she worked in the Activities Department in the monastery's Hildegard Health Center, in the Vocations Office, and volunteered at the Guadalupe Center in Huntingburg. Currently she is working on a master's degree in pastoral theology at Saint Meinrad School of Theology and is assisting in the monastery's vocations ministry.



Sister Rachel

### Sister alums celebrate jubilees

On October 26, Sisters Helen Maurer '39, Benita (Margaret) Biever '37, and Dolorita (Josephine) Libs '41 will commemorate the 75th anniversary of their monastic profession of vows. Sisters Helen and Dolorita were teachers at the Academy as well as students. Sister Helen continues to do music ministry at the monastery and gives music lessons to local area students. Sisters Dolorita and Benita serve in the ministry of prayer.

Sister Marge Sasse '52 will celebrate her 60th anniversary of her monastic profession of vows on October 26, also. She currently teaches religious education at Ferdinand and does support services at the monastery.



Sister Helen



Sister Benita



Sister Dolorita



Sister Marge

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# Jottings

## AIC/MHA Alumnae Association

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## Coming Events

Just a few of the coming events on the hill. Check the monastery website for more events and details: [thedome.org/events](http://thedome.org/events)

- October 11 “Hope for the Dome Youth Rally” — High school youth are invited to an outdoor extravaganza of prayer, service, and celebration.
- October 18 Benedictine Hills Pilgrimage – between Saint Meinrad Archabbey and Ferdinand Monastery
- October 26 Sacred Music Concert – University of Evansville Choir

### Spirituality Ministry Programs

- November 1–2 Praying with Icons
- November 8 Forgiving What We Cannot Forget
- December 13 Praying with the Psalms
- January 3 Grace in Our Christian Life
- January 5–7 Come Away Retreat
- January 10 Hispanic Culture and Catholic Customs

### Events off the hill

- October 20 12th annual Dome Golf Classic at Victoria National Golf Club in Newburgh, Indiana
- November 15–16 Christkindlmarkt: Ferdinand’s Old World German Christmas Festival



## Save the Date!

**2015 Alumnae Reunion:  
June 27-28**