

I taught at GHA for five years, and had the great opportunity to start with Form C, the third and fourth graders and move with them through Form E, when they were eighth graders. This was an experience unlike any other in my life, one I will always treasure. The teachers I worked with and many of the children I taught have become life long friends.

Gavilan Hills Academy provides a truly unique learning experience. From the time a student begins his or her education at GHA, imagination, moral integrity, independent thinking, and high achievement in and out of the classroom is encouraged and facilitated. It is exciting to watch the children as they discover their strengths, gain confidence, then accelerate in a specific discipline. It was a gift to have participated and witnessed this for five school years.

I love the academic programs at GHA. Vocabulary is taught by incorporating a wonderful combination of spelling, dictation and grammar. Through repetition, the students not only learn important lessons in these areas, but the vocabulary material is such that they also learn important historical and scientific facts. I enjoyed learning many of these interesting stories right along with the students.

Science was always fun and exciting. At least once a year we followed up a science unit with an exciting field trip. Because the classes are small, these trips were always up close and personal. Parents are welcomed and encouraged to participate, which provides an opportunity for whole families to create wonderful memories.

Literature was one of my favorite subjects. I had the freedom to choose novels and authors appropriate for each class. Many students who had struggled with reading and comprehension developed a love of reading and adventure when introduced to the right authors. We read *Call of the Wild*, *Treasure Island*, *The Hobbit*, and several other classics, as well as more contemporary novels such as *Holes* and *My Side of the Mountain*. The best adventure we had as a class was reading *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen.

Math is always a challenge to teach. A class of students who may all be at the same level in other subjects are often at a variety of different levels in math. The last year I taught at GHA, I had 11 students who were at five different math levels. Because of the small groups and the classroom schedules, this was not a problem. Students capable and willing to progress at a faster pace were allowed to do so, while those needing more assistance were encouraged and given the extra help they needed. I love that in addition to learning math concepts, the students learn math vocabulary. Not only do students learn to do the problem solving, but they, in essence, learn a new language associated with mathematics.

Academically, GHA is a wonderful place to be, but one of the biggest reasons for its success is the caring attitude and spirit of friendship between teachers, students, and parents that abounds at the school. There is never a lack of service projects and social gatherings on the calendar. BBQs, Christmas gift collection for the needy, pot lucks, garden planting, Easter egg hunts, 100<sup>th</sup> Day of School celebration, and many more activities are always in the works. Each child (and teacher) is recognized on her birthday and made to feel special. Students are given the opportunity to learn life skills through personal responsibility and accountability that will serve them well throughout their life. Dress and conduct codes are enforced and respected by teachers and students alike.

The heart and soul of GHA is Mrs. Maggie Kennedy. It was a joy to work with someone who truly loves what they do. Mrs. Kennedy works hard to maintain the integrity of the school, but there is never any doubt that most of all she truly cares deeply about each student. The students recognize this and it makes such a difference in the attitude that abounds. They love her too.

I left GHA when my husband retired and we moved out of state, otherwise I would still be teaching there. I loved my time teaching, but most of all I love my students. Whenever I'm in town, I make sure I make a visit to GHA. It's the best place to be.

Mrs. Fawn Baerwaldt