

I still remember my first day of kindergarten. Mom and I had been on a trial run before the Big Day, but I still had *lots* of butterflies. The bow in the back of my pink dress was tied neatly and my curly ponytails looked perfect as I held my Mom's hand and walked cautiously into my classroom. Sixteen desks that appeared larger-than-life to my four-year-old eyes were arranged in neat rows, and my teacher, Mrs. McHenry, greeted me warmly. She lived down the street from me, but somehow she seemed different here—older maybe, or maybe just more serious. I remember my Mom cried a little as she kissed me goodbye, and I thought that was funny: After all I was the one who had to stay!

I didn't know then that it would be in that very classroom that the seed of curiosity so carefully cultivated by my parents during my first four years would take root and develop into a lifelong love for learning. It was in that classroom that I learned to add and subtract, to read and to sing (yes, all in kindergarten!). But that's not all I learned in that classroom. I learned about persistence and the rewards that come from hard work. Of course, I wouldn't have seen it that way as a kindergartner, but I remember how great I felt when I finally learned to spell "color" after days of practice. I remember how exciting it was to realize that two plus two would *always* equal four. And I remember that every time a light came on for me (or for any of the other students), Mrs. McHenry's face would light up as if she'd just learned it for the first time, too.

What I value most about my Gavilan Hills Academy experience is that it gave me the tools to succeed in all of my other academic pursuits. Early in elementary school I learned how to use a planner and how to budget my time. In my junior high years I took a required class called Study Tactics, which helped me evaluate the best ways for me to learn. When I left GHA after eighth grade to go to boarding school, I was well-prepared for the rigors of an intense college preparatory curriculum.



But my experience at GHA was about so much more than just academics. I remember field trips and Secret Santa gift exchanges. I remember learning to make candles one year and making my first batch of 1000 Island dressing in first-grade cooking class. I also remember having chores. I remember taking out the trash and sweeping the lunch area on my assigned day. It was at GHA that I learned being part of a community means giving back. It means taking responsibility for your actions and looking out for others. It means working hard *and* having a good attitude about it. These are lessons I started to learn in Mrs. McHenry's class but which were consistently reinforced throughout my years at Gavilan Hills Academy.

I will always be grateful for my GHA experience, which paved the way not just for my success in school but for my success in life.

*Nancy P. Kennedy graduated from eighth grade at Gavilan Hills Academy in 1992. She attended Santa Catalina School in Monterey, CA, and graduated with highest honors in 1996. While there, she was Editor-in-Chief of both the school newspaper and the literary magazine and participated in numerous community service activities. She received her bachelor's degree in history from Duke University in 2000 and graduated from the J. Reuben Clark Law School at Brigham Young University in 2007. Nancy lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, where she works as a Resource Development Coordinator at United Way of Salt Lake.*