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Westlake Girls
High School
Alumni News
December
2014

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From the Alumni Co-ordinator



Hi everyone!

Thank you to all the alumni who have contributed to another year of growth and activities. It's great to see the many ways in which ex students are reconnecting: helping with the WHS Founders group, sharing experiences and passing on advice to current students, helping with the newsletter, allowing profiles and photos to be shared in newsletters, presentations at assembly to encourage new WGHS graduates, passing on photos and cuttings that tell Westlake's story, being available for feedback and suggestions, meeting up in London, passing on news of alumni, engaging through Facebook and many more.

Thanks for finding the time to continue building our network. Have a great summer break. I look forward to further progress and links next year.

Cathy Roughan, Alumni Co-ordinator

Alumni Association Update

For the new alumni members, a new [Facebook group \(Class of 2014\)](#) is now up and running.

Other groups and networks are strengthening. It's great to have passed the goal of 1000 Facebook likes on our [Alumni Facebook page](#) by the end of the year (now 1074 likes).

Our [Westlake Girls High School Alumni and Friends](#) LinkedIn group currently has 72 members.

There are a number of other Alumni Groups you can join that are expanding steadily:

- [Class of 1987](#)
- [Class of 2008](#)
- [Class of 2009](#)
- [Class of 2010](#)

- [Class of 2012](#)
- [Class of 2013](#)
- [Class of 2014](#)
- [Key Cygnetures \(Choir\)](#)
- [Choralation Alumni](#)
- [Westlake Boys Alumni Page \(Westlakers\)](#)
- [Westlake Symphony Orchestra Alumni](#)

Keep in touch. Updates, contributions and suggestions are always welcome.

Alumni in the News

Lucy Knight (Class of 1987)

Lucy was the 'Good Samaritan' who was badly injured as she tried to prevent a bag snatch on the North Shore late in September. The outpouring of support for her actions was amazing. Lucy is part of a Facebook Group of over 70 Westlake alumni from her year. Our best wishes to Lucy and her family as she continues her recovery.

Massey University Blues Awards 2014

Congratulations to **Zoe Ballantyne** (athletics), **Anona Pak** (badminton), **Erin Nayler** (football), **Jo Aleh** (yachting), and **Eryn Crombie** (hockey).

Waikato University

Britta Balzat was awarded a Music Blues Award and is also the Waikato University Sir Edmund Hillary Scholar this year.

Annabelle Fitzgerald showcased her designs in the end of year Graduate Showcase for the Massey School of Design, Wellington, and was [featured in the Dominion Post](#) as 'a young designer to watch'.

Harbour Sports Awards 2014

Current and former students were amongst the winners at this year's awards. The Harbour Raiders Women's Volleyball team won the Regional Team of the Year with ex-student **Charlotte Joy** and two current WGHS students, **Imogen Frances** and **Annalise Vukets**, as members.

Former student and New Zealand Hockey player **Rhiannon Dennison** won the Maori Sports Performer award while **Jo Aleh**, along with her partner **Olivia Powrie**, won the International Performance by a Team for sailing.

AIMES Awards

Hye Won Suh won the Music Award (\$10,000) at the 2014 North Harbour Club AIMES Awards.



String Quartet in Paris - Korutet



Charmian Keay (01-04), **Coralie Usmani** (02-03), **Eunice Park** (2000-03). Three members of this string quartet, named Korutet, from the image of a koru as a scroll of a stringed instrument, are Westlake Girls alumnae and university music graduates.

They got the opportunity to travel to Paris, to perform and collaborate with French musicians and composers after a successful application to the NZ France Friendship Fund. Crowdfunding and fundraising concerts in NZ helped provide further necessary funds.

The Westlake alumnae, **Charmian Keay** (violin), **Eunice Park** (cello) and **Coralie Usmani**, (violin) all participated fully in Westlake music – Key Cygnetures choir and the Symphony and Chamber Orchestras. Charmian has some happy memories of winning Gold every year at The Big Sing and the KBB festival, the WSO tour to Sydney and the opera 'Dido and Aeneas' in the 5th Form.

The quartet, founded two years ago, want to bring classical music to a wider audience and have chosen to have a focus on contemporary classical (music by living composers). We look forward to hearing more of the musical progress of the quartet and the many musicians in our Westlake alumni community.

Recent Alumni Activities

Westlake Arts: Past and Present



For the first time, alumni artists from both Westlake Boys' and Girls' High Schools joined with art educators and current Westlake students in a collaborative art exhibition. It was held at the Northart Gallery in Northcote in October. There was an impressive line up of well-established galleried artists from our combined alumni communities. Opening night was a very enjoyable event complemented by a string quartet and jazz combo from Westlake.

Thanks to the artists who exhibited and contributed to this growing annual event.

Catherine Outwin: Class of 1983 Artist



Catherine is a full-time galleried artist who, for the second year, joined Westlake students, staff, and alumni to exhibit artworks.

She attended Westlake from 1979 to 1983. Then, she followed her

passion for arts with arts papers at Auckland University, qualifications in performing arts, Life Drawing and contemporary painting at Whitecliffe, and in 2004, the Certificate in Visual Arts at M.I.T.

She is primarily an abstract painter and works with resin and mixed media, aiming to create a dynamic interplay between elements, and is 'inspired by meditations on subjects such as light and landscape'.

In 2013, one of her paintings in her new series, 'Pools of Colour' won 1st prize in the Mixed Media category at the Royal Easter Show Art Awards. She had previously taken 1st prize there for her artwork, "Beehive Wrapsody" in 2007.

Catherine has been in solo and many group exhibitions throughout New Zealand and has work in private collections as far afield as Tennessee, Australia and the UK. She has also worked in the performing arts including song-writing, performing in several bands and acting on the stage and television.

Westlake High School Reunion Tea and Tour

The Founding group of both Westlake High Schools had a reunion afternoon tea and tour of the school at Westlake Girls recently. It was a great chance for a catch up and look around the school for around 65 of the co-ed group who attended school on the Westlake Girls High School site between 1957 and 1961, before the school split into separate schools.



1957 Foundation Pupils and Staff

The former students enjoyed the interaction with prefects as they guided them around, noting that the hall is the only remaining part of the original school of 1957.

Some of the group came from Wellington, Manawatu, Taupo and Northland as well as the Auckland area, to catch up with old friends. Nearly 40 other WHS students have been in touch again and expressed their interest in the Westlake Alumni communities, including some based in London, Switzerland, German, Australia and Canada.



A WHS group tours the school

The function was co-hosted by both schools and we both hope this is the first step in re-connecting with this group of alumni. Please contact alumni@westlakegirls.school.nz for information on this WHS founders group and the alumni association of Westlake Girls High School, and for Westlake Boys, email codowd@westlake.school.nz

Archives

Our recent connection with the Westlake High School Founders has also renewed our interest in recording and preserving our milestones and stories. We have a number of interesting photos of those early years. We are keen to build up our resources with photos and articles about the school through its 57 years, so if you have anything that might be of interest please get in touch - alumni@westlakegirls.school.nz

Plans for 2015

Activities and dates are still to be decided and the first newsletter for 2015 will outline activities.

Some thoughts:

- Another afternoon tea for former staff of Westlake
 - Involving more alumni in the Technology Showcase in October
 - Alumni involvement in the collaborative Westlake art exhibition
 - An informal catch up with the Westlake High school co-ed Founders
 - Possible London catch-up
 - Possible catch-up in Australia (Sydney? Melbourne?)
 - And more..... Any suggestions or requests?
-

ALUMNA PROFILE, Class of 1959-62**Sandra Easterbrook (James)
Netball International**

Sandra Easterbrook, (James) was Westlake's first international netball player, and as well as being in the A basketball(netball) team, she was in the 1st X1 Cricket Team and Athletics and Swimming Teams. In 1962, the Westlake A Team won the major secondary school competition in Auckland – 'quite something against the more established schools over the bridge'.



The 1961 Netball team

L-R from the back – Pauline Bridger, Sandra Peterson, Robyn Armstrong, Mrs Curtis(coach), Colleen Levien, Sandra James, Pamela Blanshard, Robyn Chalmers

Sandra recalls: 'Netball in 1959, when we started Westlake, was the first year of 7 aside basketball. It was a whole new concept for everyone. When we played 9 aside, you could throw the ball the length of the court. I used to throw it from the defence end to Robyn Chalmers, as she was a shooter. I was good at throwing the discus! When 7 aside came in we couldn't do that any more because of the ball having to be touched in each third'.

She pursued teaching as a career, with her first position at Onepoto Primary School in 1965 and was called into the NZ trials the following year from the Northland team, having been posted to a teaching position there.



Sandra James 1967 in the National Team

In 1967 she became the youngest member of the NZ team which set off for the World Champs in Perth. That team was the first NZ netball team to win a World Tournament title, although there was little publicity for the sport at that time. Although selected for the NZ team to tour Jamaica and England in 1967, a recurring spinal injury meant that she was unable to tour or play at international level again.

Recognition of the team's achievements came in 1996 when the 1967 team was inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame.

Now living in Northland, Sandra keeps in touch with some of her school netball friends. Two, Robyn Chalmers and Robyn Burgess(nee Armstrong) attended the Westlake High School gathering while Sandra was unable to be there this time.

She continued her interest in netball over the years by coaching school and rep teams in Northland after retiring from play, and now plays golf and follows sailing avidly - her son-in-law was a grinder on Emirates Team NZ in San Francisco. Her links with Westlake netball continue too, as she presented a cup for 3rd Form(Y9) netball.

We are looking forward to seeing her back at Westlake to show her the sporting facilities available to current students.



Sandra 2014 with granddaughter Brooke holding the commemorative teddy bear presented at the 1996 induction

ALUMNA PROFILE, Class of 2007

Moira De Villiers

Judoka, Silver Medallist - Commonwealth Games 2014



Moira De Villiers won Silver in the U70 judo in the Glasgow Commonwealth Games earlier this year.

Her first steps with the sport were in South Africa, from the age of 4, and she regularly won competitions there. When the family moved to New Zealand in 2003, she continued to compete at a high level, winning secondary school competitions and national junior titles. In her final year she held several titles including the NZ U70 Championship, and won Bronze in the Pacific Rim Championship in Taiwan.

She has had considerable success at national and international level, winning the Oceania Championships 2010 -2014, and being the NZ U70 Champ 2011-2013. In 2012, she competed at the London Olympics.

Moira is based in Christchurch along with her partner, Jason Koster, who was also a medallist in the Glasgow Games, as part of the very successful NZ Judo squad. Her training and competitions are fitted around her work as an optician and both Moira and her partner have the Rio Olympics as their goal. Moira is currently ranked 3rd in the Commonwealth and 16th in the world.

Moira returned to Westlake to talk with staff about her goals in 2012, and we hope to keep in touch and follow her progress in the future.

ALUMNA PROFILE, Class of 2008

Paris Kirby

Designer, Artist, PR, Artistic Director, Event Manager

Paris returned to Westlake recently to talk to students about courses at Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design. This was in one of her varied roles – Marketing Co-ordinator for Whitecliffe. She also participated in this year's Westlake art exhibition.

During her time at Westlake she was passionate about fashion and design and in her final year, 2008, she won the prestigious national award, Newmarket Young Designer of the Year winning the chance to work for Karen Walker at her Fashion Show in New York, and a year's tuition at Whitecliffe. After a year working in the fashion industry in London she returned to study for a BFA degree at Whitecliffe, whilst also exhibiting her artworks and pursuing her diverse interests.

Multi-disciplinary collaboration is an underlying theme for Paris's ventures. She co-founded the Flagship Collective (2011- present) with the Flagship studio as the home and event space for a group of creative young people. Her projects include working in the Art Department for Rhythm and Vines 2009-2012, Costume Design for Ladyhawk 2012, Event Organising for First Thursdays, Art Direction for Stolen Girlfriends Club, NZ Fashion Week 2013, and window dressing and merchandising for The Department Store in 2013.

Paris loves being able to develop her creative interests while sharing her enthusiasm with others. Future plans include studying for a Masters in Fine Arts at Whitecliffe.



ALUMNA PROFILE, Class of 1998

Anne-Elise Smithson

Green Party Candidate - 2014

Film Producer, Tutor, Freelance TV Researcher



Anne-Elise Smithson returned to Westlake in July as a member of the Sir Peter Blake Dream Team, sharing her thoughts on leadership with senior students at her old school. She was a candidate for the Green Party in the Northcote electorate in the 2014 election.

Anne-Elise had varied interests when a student at Westlake and continued to pursue language and sciences through university. She graduated with a BA/BSc in French and Biology, before completing a Diploma in Film and Television Production. Her subsequent occupations and work experience reflect her continuing interest in these fields.

Her Biology studies, focusing on NZ ecology and conservation, developed into a desire to mitigate human impacts on the environment and led to her political involvement. Her knowledge of French took her to France for a year in 2004-5, and she has worked in New Zealand as a private tutor in French since 2010. Anne-Elise's media experience is varied and includes working as an assistant producer and researcher for NZ and BBC productions. Currently, Anne-Elise is a producer for Blind Owl films.

ALUMNA PROFILE, Class of 2004

Kaiying Chin Entrepreneur - Singapore



Kaiying Chin graduated from WGHS in 2004 and gained a scholarship to undertake study for a Bachelor of Chemical Engineering (Hons) at the National University of Singapore.

She was head girl in her final year and is grateful for the many

opportunities afforded her at Westlake and the confidence shown in her by her peers and teachers which helped her set challenges for herself. Her drive and passion were evident in that final year, and her fundraising drive for World Vision saw her being selected as one of their Ambassadors, and visiting Cambodia to see aid projects that NZ supported.

While she completed her degree at NUS, she made time to run National Business Plan Competitions, was President of the Entrepreneurship Society, learned sign language and volunteered for the Singapore School for the Deaf.

She developed her passion for entrepreneurship during university and landed her first job as an investments manager with an early stage venture fund in Singapore. From there she managed key accounts for healthcare multinationals in Malaysia, helping to build a healthcare startup in Singapore. She is now with a fintech company managing strategic relations and business development and is a member of the AsiaNZ Young Leaders Network and Singapore Business & Professional Women's network. She feels fortunate to have been mentored along the way by a number of visionary business leaders.

On the professional front, she hopes to continue strengthening her business and managerial skills, add value to the new venture she's a part of and be a great colleague. On the personal front, she hopes to keep exploring new frontiers during her travels, learn new languages, embrace new cultures, and remember to make time for family and friends.

It is great to make contact with Kaiying again and hear how she is using her leadership and business skills in Singapore. She enjoys contact with Westlake and was at the Paragon Mall to hear the Choralation choir sing there on their way to Europe earlier this year.

ALUMNA PROFILE, Class of 1990

Bronwen Connor

**Associate Professor in Pharmacology
Director of the Neuro-Discovery Facility
Centre for Brain Research, University of
Auckland**

Alumna Bronwen Connor, an Associate Professor at the University of Auckland, was the guest speaker at the Westlake Girls Academic Prize giving for 2014.

Bronwen mapped some of her journey at the prize giving with messages to the students about keeping options open, being willing to try new and challenging pathways and encouraging more women into a range of science-



related fields.

Bronwen's own career dreams ranged from her childhood, 'zookeeper', through to 'journalist' and 'Graphic Designer' at high school, before she discovered a keen interest in the workings of the brain during her early years at Auckland University. She went on to gain her BSc in Pharmacology and Physiology and then her doctorate in Neuropharmacology there.

Following this, she undertook study at Northwestern University in Chicago, as the Neurological Foundation of NZ Wrightson Fellow, investigating the use of gene therapy for the treatment of Parkinson's Disease.

Bronwen is now based at the Centre of Brain Research at the University of Auckland where she is Head of the Neural Reprogramming and Repair Lab. Her specific interest is in the identification and development of novel protective or regenerative strategies to treat neurological disease, with particular focus on the potential use of stem cell therapy and gene transfer techniques for the treatment of brain injury and disease.

Her work has been described as 'ground-breaking'. In 2013, NEXT magazine selected her as their Woman of the Year in Health and Science.

Our thanks to Bronwen for returning to Westlake and sharing her experience and passion with us.



ALUMNA PROFILE, Class of 1975

Renelle Gronert

**ANZCD Arch (Unitec), BArch, MArch (Hons)
(Auckland)**

Renelle is a graduate of the University of Auckland School of Architecture and a practising Registered Architect. Her practice specialises in sustainable residential housing design creating new houses, housing developments, light commercial or house alterations.

She has a Master's degree in Sustainable Architecture in which she developed an area of expertise in Sustainability, specialising in energy efficient building, and provision of healthy living and working environments.



She attended Westlake Girls High School from 1972 – 1975, where she enjoyed the arts as well as having a strength in maths, a combination that led to her career as an architect.

She recalls, 'Mrs Waters was an inspirational maths teacher and Sue McBride was influential in my art development. I have fond memories of the old art and photography rooms and am very impressed with the new art department'.

Her sporting passion was hockey, which as well as playing centre-forward, she coached and refereed under the guidance of Mrs Coates.

Renelle also lectures part-time as an Industry Professional at Unitec. She started her architectural career as an architectural technician, and graduated from the School of Architecture in 1995, later registering as an architect. She followed this with a Master's degree in Sustainable Architecture, a subject of personal interest and relevant to future architecture, graduating in May 2012. Her professional and academic interests related to architecture, are sustainability, green architecture, energy conservation and thermal comfort.

Some of her works have been published in magazines such as 'Trends' and 'Home Beautiful' and she was interviewed for the TV production 'My House My Castle' when it featured Townhouses in Newmarket. Most recently the TV series 'Nothing Trivial' had a good amount of screenplay show-casing a modernist house she designed, which was 'Michelle's home' in the series.

As well as her Master's thesis she has co-written conference papers and a blog on New Zealand's first certified Passive House built in Auckland (PH1NZ).

Some works and papers can be seen on her website: www.renelle.co.nz

ALUMNA PROFILE, 2000-2001

Nodira Khoussainova
Software Engineer with Twitter



Nodira is a software engineer with Twitter and is based in San Francisco. She followed an unusual, fast track route through high school with just two years at Westlake Girls, 2000 and 2001, before being accepted into the University of Auckland to pursue her B.Sc (Computer Science).

During her 4th Form year at school she was also studying one course per semester at university, and as she did well in the university courses, she went straight to attending university full time the following year.

While her time at Westlake was short, she has fond memories of it, and learned a lot during her time there, enjoying many classes including maths, social studies, English and Japanese.

She says 'To this day, I remember Mrs Poole (my maths teacher). She was such an amazing teacher and she was really good at explaining complicated concepts in such a way that all of us would understand it. On top of all that, maths was normally one of the easier subjects for me, but Mrs Poole would push me and encourage me to work on harder problems'.

Once at university, Nodira continued on the fast track completing her degree in 2 years followed by one more year to graduate with First Class Honours. Along the way her talents were recognised with an AIMES award from the North Harbour Club, and she won the IT Award in 2003, (\$10,000), and the IT and Supreme Award in 2005, (\$17,000).

From university she managed to secure an internship at Microsoft Research in Seattle, USA. She says, 'I'm not sure how, but I randomly just emailed one of the pioneers in database management and convinced him to give me an internship'.

During this internship she pursued a PhD at the University of

Washington. Her topic was designing and building systems to help non-computer-specialists more easily perform large-scale data analytics.

In early 2012, having completed her PhD, she went through an intensive job search process involving a month of preparation - reading books designed specifically to prepare you for software engineering interviews, as well as several mock interviews with friends. Her applications and interviews resulted in offers from six companies including Google, Microsoft, and Twitter. She says, 'In the end, I was most excited about working at Twitter so I went with that option!'

At Twitter, she joined the Trends Team which designs and implements the algorithms for automatically identifying the topics people are talking about *right now* around the world.

She now works in the Experimentation team, building and supporting frameworks for different groups at Twitter to run experiments and collect data from users and make decisions on the release of new features.

Nodira has family connections back in NZ and we look forward to seeing her back at Westlake to share some of her experiences with the students.

NOTE on PRIVACY and GATHERING of DATA

The information that you have already provided in signing up to the Alumni Association is collected by Westlake Girls High School's Alumni Association for the purpose of keeping in contact with you about the School, its former students and staff, and about the Alumni Association and its activities. Your personal information may be stored by the Alumni Association using a cloud storage facility such as Google. Your personal information will not be used for any other purpose, or shared with any other person or organisation, without your consent. You may, at any time, request access to, and correction of, your personal information by contacting the Alumni Association at alumni@westlakegirls.school.nz.



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The Alumni Association thanks WGHS alumna, Hannah Dymond for her time and expertise in producing this newsletter.

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