

Alumni Spotlight:

Emily Bennetts

I attended Montessori from Primary through 6th grade, then moved to Greens Farms Academy for 7th and 8th, then Trinity Catholic for high school. I then went to Marist College and studied Psychology. Attending schools with varying philosophies and student bodies allowed me to interact with individuals with many different backgrounds and personalities. I grew in my empathy and understanding of just how different people can be—and learn. Teaching came naturally to me, but my passion for it came through my experiences in all sorts of different classrooms. I saw how some students thrived in a particular environment while others floundered. I also witnessed how the philosophy, attitude and respect of a teacher can make or break a learning environment. I came to believe that education should recognize students as whole people and further take into account various needs, skill sets, and passions that an individual brings to the classroom. I am currently working in a Montessori school, but ultimately want to work towards remodeling the standardized education system.

I am most grateful for the people and experiences I have had in my life. Both have al-

lowed me to broaden my view of the world and encouraged my ability to change it. Traveling and trying new things have helped me to understand myself further, while having friends and family who love and accept me as I am has given me a comfortable base to come back to.

Every choice we make can have a positive or negative impact—and acting impulsively can often leave us with results we don't initially consider. We can make someone so much happier through an act of kindness as simple as a smile, which in turn will most likely encourage them to help someone else out too. That's very powerful.

My favorite memories of Montessori are all centered around my teachers allowing me to be myself, while also pushing me out of my comfort zone. I remember working for weeks on a project about Galileo with a handful of friends in Lower Elementary—we decided we were interested in his life and work and created a huge timeline. We were allowed to work freely on this in the hallway, and through it we not only learned about Galileo but also responsibility, teamwork, and independence. I also remember my 6th grade play—Pirates of Penzance—in which

I was given the role of the Major General. As a 6th grade girl, the role of a crochety old man was less than desirable and I remember coming home very upset and remained so for a period of time. Ultimately, this was probably the most fun I've ever had in a theater production, and delivered results that I never would have dreamed the day we got our roles. This encouraged me to have an open mind and trust myself. Montessori also allowed me to connect with the natural

world in a very unique way through being able to have recess in the woods—there was an incredible amount of trust from our teachers involved here. We created extravagant forts, climbed trees and sometimes stumbled upon animal remains that teachers helped us to preserve and identify (I still have a skull I found in Upper Elementary). Our teachers understood the importance of letting children intimately connect with the earth and it has enriched me incredibly.

