

Otago Girls' High School

Alumni Newsletter - June 2023

Principal's report

Kia ora koutou

We are delighted to send you our Alumni newsletter for the second term and to greet you in the heart of the Winter. Matariki has become an important time of remembrance and gratitude on our school calendar, with a Whānau Hui, Matariki Assembly and other events to mark the rising of the Matariki star cluster in the southern sky. We have had a mild Winter to date and await the real snow for our annual Year 13 PE Cross-country Ski and Ski-Snowboard trips.

This week we launch our 18 month Alumni Appeal, aimed at raising much needed funds for our Nautilus Chorale Choir, the Rowers and Wairua Pūhou, our kapa haka performance group. These activities are targeted because they have huge ongoing costs associated with them. Please consider if you are able to donate some money to this most worthy appeal, which will be split equally between all three groups. The process for donation is outlined at the back of the Appeal brochure and on our website under the Alumni tab. We are also launching an 'Alumni and Friends of the School' donations page for general levels of donation. All donors will be acknowledged - privately or publicly by choice. We rely entirely on fundraising for many activities and this is a great way of giving back to your school.

We continue to receive memorabilia and historic items associated with the school and love to hear stories associated with these gifts. Many thanks to the people who have returned treasures or prizes, books or badges to the school as these form a link with the past and contribute to the ongoing narrative of our school. We also welcome visits by ex-students at any time and are happy to arrange tours of the school by request.

Our school year is continuing apace and we have had two truly fabulous terms this far. Recently Catherine Lund won the New Zealand Schools' Senior Girls' Cross-Country in Palmerston North, our Year 12 band 'The Burberry Scarves' won the regional Rock Quest final, and we held our incredible OGHS/OBHS Combined Production 'The Magic City' written and directed by our own drama teacher, Lauren Mackay. We await Choir results from our choral performances at the regional 'Big Sing' and are hopeful of being selected for either the Big Sing or Cadenza events. We gained two third place awards at the regional Manu Korero Māori Public Speaking competition. We also enjoyed Swimming Sports, Year 11 Geography Camp to Mount Cook, Year 10 Marae trip to Puketeraki Marae, Pacific Voices Public Speaking Competition and Climbing and High Ropes Outdoor Education adventures. We finished the term with the Year 12 Formal at Glenfalloch and the House Haka Competition.

Stay warm and enjoy the gifts of Winter. We look forward to our Spring get-together with you all on 13th October in the school hall at 5pm.

Ngā mihi nui
Bridget Davidson



Bridget Davidson



Otago Girl's High School

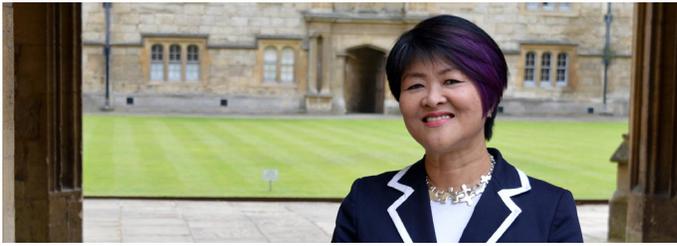


Celebrating 152 years of Excellence



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25/03/24



Mindy Chen-Wishart, Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of Oxford



Mai Chen, Senior and Founding Partner, Chen Palmer Public and Employment Law Specialists, best-selling author of Public Law Toolbox, Chair of the Superdiversity Institute of Law, Policy and Business and Inaugural Chair of NZ Global Women, NZ Asian Leaders, Superdiverse Women

Mai and Mindy Chen

We are delighted to receive news that this year sisters Mindy and Mai Chen, distinguished alumni of Otago Girls' High School, will be awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws from the University of Otago. Mindy was co-dux of the school with Morag Cunningham in 1978. Mai was Head Girl, Dux and Best All Round Student of the school in 1981. The awarding of honorary degrees is a centuries-old custom of universities whereby distinguished persons are created members for life of the university concerned or (in the case of persons who are already graduates of the university) are promoted to the highest academic level in the university.

Honorary degrees are conferred by the University of Otago on persons who have given notable service to the University or community, or who have achieved eminence in scholarship or elsewhere, or who are otherwise considered worthy of recognition. The University confers the following honorary degrees: Doctor of Laws, Doctor of Science, Doctor of Literature, Doctor of Music, Doctor of Divinity, and Doctor of Commerce.

This has extra significance in the year of the 150th anniversary of the Faculty of Law at the University of Otago. Mindy will receive this honour in August

and Mai in December. We are privileged that Otago Girls' High School has been included in the celebrations.

Mai will give a graduation address at her graduation ceremony on Saturday 16 December 2023 and is keen to get in touch with old school friends and acquaintances to join her in celebrating this occasion. She has kindly written this for our alumni newsletter. Please contact admin@otagogirls.school.nz if you wish to get in touch with Mai and attend this celebration.

"Sometime last century my foundations at OGHS started me on a journey to give back to the legal profession and to my adopted country of New Zealand where my family had immigrated many years previously from Taiwan. Our early life wasn't easy with little money and no family in Aotearoa but OGHS taught me leadership and gave me high level learning and helped me to decide on a legal career that has dominated my work and my life. I am not big on honours and awards, but having a honorary Doctorate of Laws conferred by the University of Otago this December, and giving the Graduation address, is the culmination of a lifetime of work and it has made me proud and encouraged me to do more.

Pioneering the practice of Public Law was difficult as it is to do anything that is new and different. I have also found doing pro bono hours writing Public Law Toolbox and on culture and the law and on Tikanga and the law as well as founding New Zealand Asian Lawyers and the Superdiversity Institute of Law, Policy and Business a challenge alongside a full time job and being a mum and a wife. But there is no point having the eyes to see gaps in the law, and what needs changing in our community through our education and training, if we are not prepared to do anything about that. There is nothing I have not done that I thought should be done. And I am grateful for the support OGHS gave me in equipping me to give back.

My sister Mindy Chen-Wishart will also be conferred with an honorary Doctorate of Laws this year. We are great friends and that makes the conferral that much more special.

I am told that Mindy and I will be the only siblings who are Hon LLDs, and only the second Honorary Doctors of the University who are siblings. The others were another couple of high achieving sisters who preceded me at OGHS: Dame Alison Holst Hon DSc and Patricia Payne Hon DMus."

Mai Chen BARRISTER

LLB(Hons) (Otago) LLM (Harvard) CMinstD

Karen Knudson - OGHS 1977-1981

In June 2023 Karen Knudson was awarded a Queen's Service Medal (QSM) as part of the King's Birthday Honours. This recognises her service to community – and her commitment to choral music. Karen has made a significant contribution to choral music in Dunedin for more than thirty years.

Karen was Deputy Head Girl at Otago Girls' High School in 1981. She conducted the school choir from her fifth form year (year 11).

Karen's longer-term relationship with the school was between 2001 and 2015 when she was Choral Director of the Otago Girls High School Choir, the Otago Boys High School Choir (from 1998), and the combined choirs.



Karen from her performance as Maria in the Sound of Music in her seventh form year (year 13).

When I read the QSM letter I initially thought it was SPAM, then realised it wasn't. My reaction was shock – I was never thinking or expecting any kind of recognition. Making choral music and working with choirs is something I do because I love it, and can't imagine life without.

At OGHS I threw myself into opportunities offered at school, played 5 musical instruments (badly), attempted acting, accompanied, and was even allowed to conduct the school choir from fifth form. The school also organized me attending composition classes at university while I was still at school. OGHS provided enormous opportunity to "try things".

At University of Otago, I obtained a MusB (Hons) in piano performance and composition, and an MA in musical analysis. I then split my time between family, music and building and renovating residential properties.

I have spent more than 30 years involved in community music making, and teaching across the whole range of ages. Including as a piano and organ teacher and accompanist before being appointed Musical Director at Knox Church in 1997. As Musical Director at Knox, I play the pipe organ, and conduct the church and childrens' choirs, for services and concerts.

At Knox we have had the opportunity to perform large works from the choral repertoire, including Handel's "Messiah", Brahms "German Requiem", Stainer "the Crucifixion" Mendelssohn "Elijah", Vivaldi's "Gloria", Bach "Sleepers Wake".

I've been conducting the RSA Choir since 2014. I also play double bass in the Dunedin Symphony Orchestra, which is a joy.



Conducting the Knox choir combined with OGHS choir and the St Kilda Brass Band (obscured).

In 2018 the Knox Choir and I were invited to be part of an International Peace choir in Berlin, to mark 100 years since the end of WWI, performing "The Armed Man" as part of a global choir, conducted by Sir Karl Jenkins. This invitation came because the Knox choir had performed this work in 2015.

I was Choral Director of the Otago Boys High School Choir from 1998-2015, and Otago Girls High School Choir from 2001-2015, and was involved in several trips nationally and overseas. Hawaii, Japan, Australia, and China.

Choral music at high schools is an important part of building community and connections for the young people involved. For me, the focus of choral music is always on inclusivity, as well as excellence and access to life changing experiences. The mentoring of students has resulted in many going on to study performing arts and music. A focus of my work with any group is to encourage participation and musical development in vocalists and instrumentalists.

Our OGHS and OBHS choirs regularly advanced to the national finals of The Big Sing (1998-2014). The Big Sing is a national competition for secondary school choirs, where more than 250 groups compete for a place at the National Finale. In 2011, three of the 20 choirs selected for the National Finale were choirs of Otago Girls and Otago Boys students.

I also actively encourage performances of NZ choral



Me happily receiving a totara in lieu of flowers, at the end of an RSA choir performance.

music, including many Dunedin Compositions and have written many choral works for the choirs I conduct, as well as music for brass and orchestra.

I worked with Mac Te Ngahue to produce “Maranga Ra”, by Geoffry Pohatu, transcribed and harmonised by me and performed by the combined choir OGHS OBHS choir. This piece won a national award for the

best performance piece with Maori text (Auckland in 2014).

This performance is available by searching for “YouTube Maranga Ra” or by typing the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Vz4Obxx8og>

In 2015 I was invited to take a youth choir to the 32nd Shanghai Spring International Music festival. Students from Otago Girls and Boys High Schools performed at the opening ceremony of this prestigious festival and performed at several other venues over 16 days in Shanghai and Beijing.

I’ve split my time between music, building and renovating residential properties, and family. I started renovating residential properties at university and building purpose build student flat shortly after.

My current property focus is developing a residential subdivision off Northview Crescent, between Belleknowles and Kaikorai Valley. I’m a director of Northview Homes and am actively involved in landscaping and planting native trees in a large area of the land.

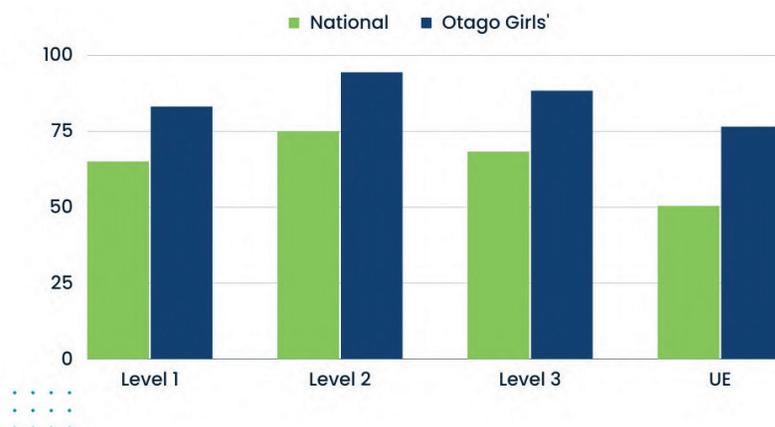
OGHS features in my family history with my mother, Dorothy Knudson nee Guthrie, attending and teaching there and two of my daughters, Calla Knudson-Hollebon and Ariana Knudson-Hollebon attending the school.

Today, my partner, Ross Brown, and I continue to live in Dunedin. We met with our five adult children (plus their partners) for Kings Birthday in Queenstown to celebrate the QSM. It was very emotional to be with family and break the news of the honour.

NCEA and University Entrance Results 2022

NCEA 2022

National Results Comparison



Year 9 Board Scholarships

We are delighted to announce our Year 9 Board Scholarship winners. We offer our congratulations to all students who received scholarships and we are also aware that this year, there were more nominations than there were awards, which recognises the absolute top quality of our Year 9 students in 2023.

We have been impressed by the enthusiastic way in which these students have embraced opportunities, embraced the school values and exhibited the real spirit of an Otago Girls' High School student. These students, along with a large group of achievers right behind them, have paved the way for success at every level of their secondary school life and we recognise their considerable talents and contributions.



Back row (L-R): Lucy Carman (A), Kymorah-Lee Taiala (S), Brooke Beaman (C), Emily Aubin (S)
Middle: Mrs Bridget Davidson, (Principal) Freya Glover (L), Jasmine Potter (C), Tessa Richardson (A), Isabella Miller (S), Ava Shaumann (C), Rosie Joyce (Year 9 Dean)
Front: Abi den Dekker (L), Sophie Beaumont (S), Hazel Early (A), Danelle Odendal (L), Ridima Jain (A), Erena Piho (L)
Absent: Joy Wilson (C)
A - Academic, C - Cultural, L - Leadership, S - Sports

Memorabilia

It's always an absolute delight when we get to receive something special. Our archivist Monique Patterson received some absolute treasures from Dr Sharyn Willis recently. Her great aunt Grace Young Johnstone was Dux of the school in 1931 and later taught French at OGHS. The donations included recordings of school singing. We appreciate any school memorabilia. Thank you Sharyn.



Susan Wardell (nee Smirk)

- OGHS 1977-1981

Kia ora koutou! I'm writing from fairly close by to OGHS, geographically, (perched in my 5th floor office overlooking the winter trees, at the University of Otago) but have packed a lot into life since I left Otago Girls in 2007.

My first step was to do a BA(Hons) in Social Anthropology and Communication Studies. During one summer break, I did a short OE with fellow OGHS alumni Hana Cadzow (nee Nyhof), including a stint of time volunteering in East Africa. When I finished my Honours degree and decided to go on to my PhD, this influenced my choice of topic, and I did some research in Uganda. I also got married, and by the time I graduated again in 2016, had two small children.



Figure 1: In my office... holding a picture of my PhD graduation, where I wore my youngest child in a front pack, as I crossed the stage.

I am now a Senior Lecturer in the Social Anthropology programme at Otago. This means my time is split between research (with most of my projects exploring topics related to care, compassion, moral emotion, health and disability, mental health, and digital worlds) and teaching (on subjects such as medical technologies, death and grief, religion and the supernatural, and cultural politics). It is a demanding job, but I love both aspects.

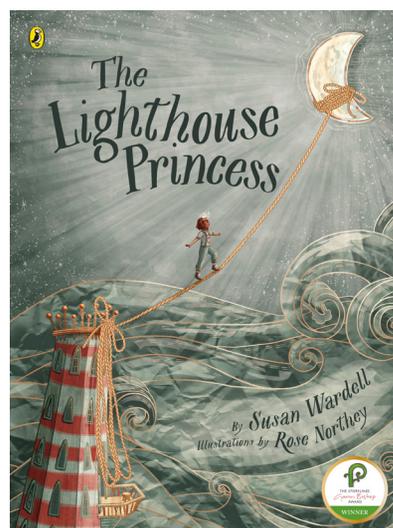
Meanwhile, I could never quite seem to let go of my interest in creative writing. For a long time I kept this consigned to scraps of time, often late at night. But I kept building my skills, supported by an amazing literary community in Dunedin, and started publishing in journals. I have since won national and international awards for poetry, essays, and flash fiction.

Since I was often telling stories to my own kids, I eventually started to experiment with children's writing too. After several publisher rejections, I got



Figure 2: Reading to children, at the Opotiki library (Bay of Plenty) on a recent Storylines tour.

an email out of the blue asking if they could use one of my manuscripts for the Gavin Bishop award. From this process, the illustrator (Rose Northey) was picked, and I got to see my story come to life through her amazing artwork. The Lighthouse Princess was published by Penguin Random House in April 2022. Since then it has won several accolades, and was recently nominated as a finalist in 3 categories for the NZCYA awards. Writing for children feels meaningful, and I plan to keep doing this.



For a long time I thought I was being a bit greedy, wanting to pursue both of my dream jobs (as an academic, and a writer), but I am finding more and more ways to bring those two parts of my life together, and forge an interesting, if slightly unusual, career path. Which suits me just fine!

Neelu Jennings (nee Memon)

- OGHs 1998-1999

Kia ora koutou, ko Neelu Jennings toku ingoa.

I am an ex-pupil of Otago Girls High School who attended the school in 1998 and 1999 as a 4th and 5th former (a very long time ago), but they are still years I remember well. I was sad to leave in sixth form but my family moved to Christchurch. This was where in the year 2000, I fell very sick with an autoimmune reaction after returning from a snowboarding trip in Wanaka. I fell into a coma for 4 months before miraculously waking up. Much of my sixth form year and part of my seventh was spent rehabilitating from the massive brain injury I had undergone. When I had regained my abilities to walk, talk, speak and swallow, I was left with partial vision (30%) and impaired balance. These are the disabilities which I still live with everyday.

Disability was not something I had a very good understanding of at all, not knowing any disabled people very well or having anyone openly disabled in my classes at school. I am embarrassed to admit I was very naive and had huge negative misconceptions and values about disabled people. So being a totally able-bodied person and now having to live as a disabled person was a huge eye opener for me. It made both the overt and subtle inequalities, discrimination, stigma and ignorance that people had about disabled people so obvious. I felt the lack of choice in every part of my life, right from education to sport to friendships, to being a teenager. Literally my whole life had changed.

Physical activity was one of the ways I felt I was in control of my life, as I could walk and even run unassisted, though the choice of activity I had to participate in had changed markedly. Blind sports were played at the Blind Foundation with other blind people. Tandem road cycling was one sport I had access to, and although I wasn't really a road cyclist, it was something I liked as it got me outdoors, so I started training. After a lot of hard work I had the opportunity to go to the world para cycling champs in Bordeaux. But I wasn't sad to put my bike away when I had finished that campaign. Instead I focused on my masters degree. I felt and still feel that the policies that govern our society are inherently disablist and set out to prove it. The conclusions I reached in my research were that without social change at a national level, the barriers that disabled people faced would never change.

In the middle of my masters, I was presented with

an opportunity to climb Mount Aspiring. Initially I just couldn't conceive of it. I still subscribed to the mainstream rhetoric about things disabled people could do, and climbing a mountain was not one of them. After coming to terms with my own perceived barriers I had placed on myself, and then dealing with the societal attitudes about disabled people's abilities, I climbed Mount Aspiring! This was with the support of my friend and guide Gavin Lang who was my eyes through the ascent. When I reached the summit, I realised I was limitless, and I could do anything I set my mind to with the right support, disabled or not!

This set the stage for the rest of my life. I have not looked back since. I skied the Tasman Glacier, completed the Coast to Coast individual multisport race, paddled across Cook Strait, and climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, all with support of keen community members. And it made me think how important community is, to enable those who face barriers (disabled, older people, those with health conditions, diverse ethnicities and genders, those who live on the fringe of poverty) to live full lives. But these populations are not recognised very well in Parliament. They are not considered attractive to the media and the overwhelming response to them by society is that the circumstances they face are their own responsibility.

At this time I also met up with an amazing woman, Mojo Mathers, at a leadership course I was doing. She was the first deaf MP in New Zealand. She has brought visibility to my community, and made people cognisant of disabled people in our society. She has articulated the barriers they face at a national level and is one of my mentors. I was lucky enough to be asked to intern for her which I gratefully accepted and made the move to Wellington.

I loved working in Mojo's office and researching disability issues and proposing solutions to the barriers that my community faced. Upon finishing the internship, I started working for the Government in the Office for Disability Issues, which was nothing like I thought it would be. Discrimination at all levels was obvious, and my task was not to help my disabled community, but to appease them and keep them quiet. I hated my job and ended up leaving, citing my Dad's illness as the reason for going. I realised that even those who were meant to be trying to ameliorate the barriers for disabled people did not understand what needed to happen. I felt we needed national awareness raising and social change if we were going to get

anywhere.

I started trying to understand better how to make the changes I wanted to see. It kept coming back to integrating our community as the way to remove barriers. I thought about my own experiences of sport being such a great platform to encourage community integration, promoting wellness, camaraderieship and shared achievement. And it made me wonder why my community was not thought of as part of the mainstream sporting community. If games could be created that disabled people and their diverse wider community could play together, everyone seeks to benefit from making new connections and being offered new opportunities. to learn more about the diverse people around them.

With the support from Capital Football and Wellington Rugby, we have created two new walking versions of football and rugby which literally anyone can take part in. It has been so incredible to see these sports be played and enjoyed by such a diverse range of people, and to see their understanding of each other grow. This will go a small way to increasing the visibility of my community which may mean many of the barriers that we face will be lessened.

And while I have been doing this I have had two kids who are the light of my life and for the last five years I have been a full time mum. I am incredibly passionate about my kids and grandkids having the same opportunities I have had to take up outdoor adventures and live a good life, and the effects of a climate changed future scare me. So when I was given the opportunity to campaign as an MP on a disability platform, I jumped at the chance. I feel so incredibly lucky to have this opportunity to empower our disadvantaged communities to have a say and fight for a more equitable Aotearoa.

I believe New Zealand can be a leader and show the rest of the world how they can become climate friendly, and we can also lead the way in ensuring our marginalised communities including disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else.



Neelu and Husband Oliver with their two children riding the Remetska Cycle Trail. The whole family love recreating together and getting out to enjoy beautiful Aotearoa.



<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/7805544/Blind-climber-ignores-stupid-limitations>



<https://www.sportzhub.com/article/interview-neelu-memon--coast-to-coast-blind-plus-more-adventures.html>

Cultural Highlights



Darcie Evans-Tobata created another successful Pacific Voices Speech Competition event showcasing Pacific voices across Dunedin and Oamaru.



Photo credit: Otago Daily Times
 "The Burberry Scarves" featuring Maya Satake, Rata Williams, Jenna Fahey and Maisie Kirk performed in the Otago finals of Rock Quest taking out 1st place, \$500 worth of music equipment from the Rockshop, and a chance to play in the national final.



Tirea Campbell placed third in the Te Rāwhiti Ihaka Junior Te Reo Māori section and Aniaka Gill placed third in the Kōrero Ohorere/Senior English Impromptu section of the Ōtākou/Murihiku Ngā Manu Kōrero speech competition.



The combined choir with Otago Boys' High School, Fortress, received a commended award, while our girls only choir, Nautilus Chorale, received a highly commended award and the NZCF Millennium Trophy for the best performance in Category 2, Choral Art Music, arguably the most prestigious award of the evening at the Big Sing regional competition. The choir have been selected to attend the Big Sing Cadenza.



Ayla Biner-McGrath and her chamber music group Vienna Calling, featuring Bertil Feng (Verdon College) and Ozan Biner-McGrath (LPHS), who were overall winners of the Otago round of the NZCT Chamber Music contest.



Photo credit: Otago Daily Times
 Tanya Moeono won the Race Unity Speech Award and will now travel to the Race Unity Hui in Auckland.

Our Talented Artists

Allison Cadzow, Year 13



Danelle Odendal, Year 9



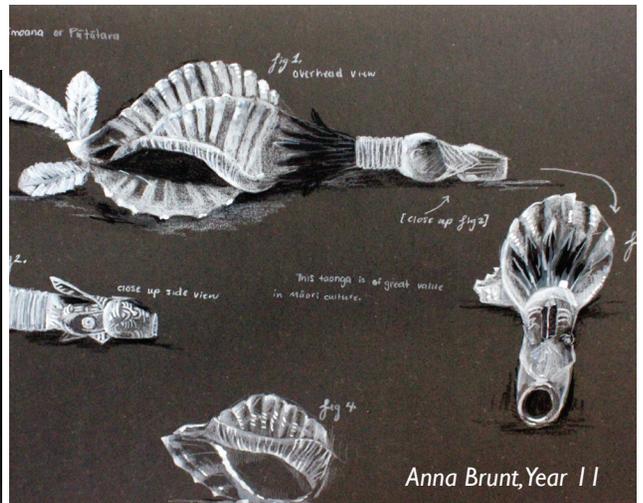
Holly Ingram, Year 11



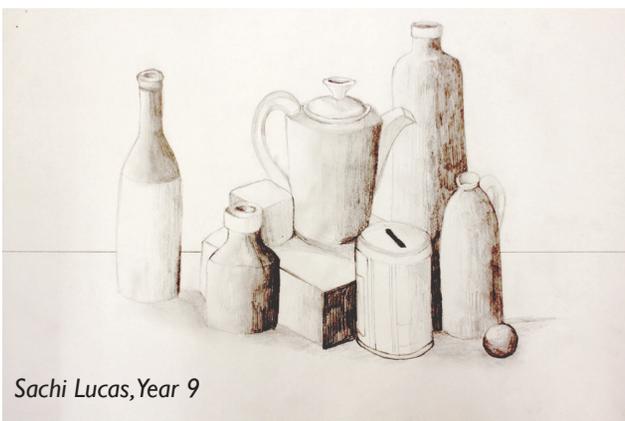
Andie McGrouther,
Year 13 Photography



Katherine McArthur,
Year 12 Sculpture



Anna Brunt, Year 11



Sachi Lucas, Year 9

Send us your stories

We would love to hear what sort of fields our ex-girls have worked in and what sort of lives they have had since their OGHs school days.

Please consider writing up to 300 words about yourself and email alumni@otagirls.school.nz including a photograph if possible.

If you are happy to have your profile published in this newsletter please let us know when you send it to us.

Ex-Girl Branch reports welcome:

This newsletter will be published three times a year, along with a Mid Year School report. We welcome reports from all Ex-Girls branches to be included in these publications. Please send these, along with any photographs to: alumni@otagirls.school.nz

Sports Achievements

HIGHLIGHTS

- Catherine Lund won the NZ Secondary School Cross Country Championships in June 2023.
- Harriet Thompson placed second in UI8 Single Sculls at the Aon Maadi Rowing Regatta.
- Beth O'Connor was jointly presented the Gillette Venus Young Player of the Year at the ANZ Cricket Awards in Auckland.
- Praise Hola named as a reserve for the NZ Secondary Schools' Netball Team.
- Immy Morey won gold in the Youth National Advanced category at the Aerobics Pacific Open competition in Melbourne.



Above: Harriet Thompson with her silver medal.
Below: Ex girl Juliette Lequeux supporting Harriet Thompson at Aon Maadi Rowing Regatta.



Catherine Lund was recognised for her hard work and dedication at the Otago Sports Awards on 9 June where she was awarded the trophy for Emerging Talent - Individual Girls award.



Photo credit: Photosport Ltd
Beth O'Connor and Kate Chandler from Wellington Girls' College were awarded Gillette Venus Young Player of the Year at the ANZ Cricket Awards.



Praise Hola pictured here in her Tania Dalton Foundation uniform.

SPRING

CONNECT

FRIENDS AND ALUMNI EVENT



**13
OCT**

OTAGO GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL

DRINKS & CANAPES

*** \$10 KOHA ***

5 PM

RSVP: ADMIN@OTAGOGIRLS.SCHOOL.NZ

Alumni and Friends of Otago Girls' High School Spring Connect Event 5-7pm 13 October 2023

Get ready to create unforgettable memories with us – we're hosting a special event with drinks and canapes. The Principal Bridget Davidson and Head Girl Paige Milburn will be speaking. Student entertainment is on the schedule, and of course, we'll be talking about our plans for our 160th anniversary.

A \$10 koha on the evening would be appreciated. We look forward to seeing you all there.

RSVP: admin@otagogirls.school.nz

OGHS PRESENTS

Mini Fair

& Night Food Market

Fundraising money for court resurfacing projects

OCTOBER 27TH | 5PM - 8PM
41 TENNYSON STREET

Rent a stall
4x3m for \$25. Bring your own table and sell your wares. Limited spots available!
Please contact: sw@otagogirls.school.nz

OPEN NIGHT

Celebrating 152 years of Excellence

JULY 25

TOURS 5PM AND 6PM

BOOK YOUR TOUR NOW
OTAGOGIRLS.SCHOOL.NZ

Keep us informed

Please remember to keep us updated with your current email address. Every time we send this newsletter out we find we have a large number of email addresses that are no longer active.

Student Writing

Medan, Indonesia

I woke up to the gentle sound of birdsong, interrupted by the misaligned clucking of chickens. Slowly, I crept towards my sister's bed and found her eyes wide open, our gazes met in silent understanding. Hastily, we got dressed and, with our mother's permission, ventured into the front yard. We frolicked around, embracing the playful company of the wandering kittens, their soft fur caressing our tiny hands. As hunger set in, we reluctantly made our way back home, our routine unfolding like any ordinary day.

However, a seemingly innocent closure of my hand raised suspicion in my mother's discerning eyes. She insisted I reveal its contents. Uncertain of what I held, I opened my hand, exposing a baby house gecko. It leapt from my grasp, triggering a shriek from my sister and an unsuccessful attempt by my mother to hurl her shoe at it. With no shoes left, the gecko darted around the room, desperately searching for an exit. At that moment, I snapped into action, leaping to catch it. Sadly, during the battle of shoes, the gecko lost its tail, which twirled on the tiled floor, a fascinating sight to me but met with an "eww" from my sister. Mother's expression conveyed her displeasure with the situation.

Later on, Mom took a moment to sit me down and explained why it was important to return the baby gecko to its natural habitat, emphasizing the value of freedom for all living creatures. Her words struck a chord within me, and I felt a pang of guilt for confining the gecko. Determined to correct my mistake, I promptly took the baby gecko outside, with my mother observing closely. Alongside the gecko in my hand, I revealed a hidden collection of geckos that I had gathered in a container under the bed, which drew mixed reactions from Mom and my sister.

Mom's expression underwent a remarkable transformation, evolving from concern to complete disbelief and shock as she beheld the sight of my gecko clan collection. Her eyebrows arched high, her eyes widened. Realizing my intention to release every single gecko, a mixture of pride and amusement tugged at the corners of her mouth, struggling to contain her incredulous laughter. Meanwhile, my sister's jaw dropped as she stared at the unexpected assortment of geckos I had secretly amassed. She stood right beside the door, ready to run to the other room if any happened to escape.

Now, as I reflect on that memorable day, waves of laughter wash over me. The memory elicits a vivid image of both my mother's and sister's faces frozen in a blend of astonishment, shock, and sheer disbelief. Their expressions told the tale of an unexpected revelation, revealing a delightful mix of emotions brought forth by my unique collection and the sincere intention to set them free.

Rana Alsharif IOMgw



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This newsletter was compiled by Kathryn Dick and Cheree Henderson on behalf of the OGHS Alumni Association.