

Polly T. Donald Enrichment Fund

Each year, Friends' School makes an award to one or more staff members from the Polly T. Donald Enrichment Fund. Generous parents and community donors created this fund as a tribute to former head of school, Polly Donald. The fund provides a unique opportunity for faculty and staff to revitalize and grow outside of the classroom. Polly believes that an individual's personal growth inevitably enriches those with whom he or she comes into contact. The fund aims to revitalize and inspire and support personal growth, enriching the Friends' School Community at large. This year's recipients of the Polly T. Donald Enrichment Fund were Lindsey Hilliard and Liz Richards. Their stories about how they used their awards follow below.

Lindsey Hilliard **Physical Education Teacher**

In June of 2016 I had the privilege of receiving the Polly T. Donald Fund. With the funds that I received, I was able to attend a yoga retreat in beautiful Carson, New Mexico at the Vista Verde ranch. I did yoga and meditation everyday for five days! If you're wondering why I am so Zen every time you see me this year...it was because of this! We also hiked all around, learning about the native people who once used the area as a stopping ground to rest and to hunt. We also spent a day at Ojo Caliente hot springs where we soaked, hiked and practiced yoga in a beautiful yurt by the river. As I type this I am once again overwhelmed with gratitude. And not only was I able to go on this amazing adventure, but the funds also helped to cover some of my child care while I was gone. This enabled me to practice being fully present because I knew that my babies were having fun and being well taken care of while I was away.

Thank you thank you for this experience! I have a deeper love of yoga and meditation and everyday a deeper love of Friends' School!



Liz Richards
5th Grade Teacher

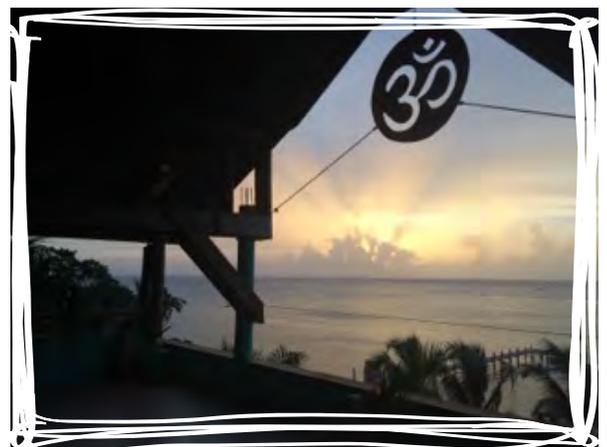
Hello Friends! I am happy to share the amazing trip I was so fortunate to experience because of the Polly Donald Enrichment Fund. I feel very lucky to have gone diving off the coast of Honduras in the waters around Roatan Island. I had been diving two other times some 20 years ago, I loved it and have always wanted to continue. The main reason for not having kept up with it is the expense of travel. It was an especially meaningful trip because at that time my kids were traveling through 3rd world countries and were away for a month, often without communication. Diving in a tropical paradise was a nice way to keep my mind off of them.



Before my trip, I completed my diving certification in Colorado. And through recommendations from friends and the use of Trip Advisor I was able to book accommodations at Tranquil Seas Resort on the north coast of Roatan Island, an eco-resort with a dive shop and yoga studio. Because it was low season there was only one other group visiting the resort – a group of women on a yoga retreat. Yowza! After having met their trip leader in the transport from the airport, I soon found myself joining their group for meals, yoga,

island excursions, and disco dancing. I was so lucky to have the luxury of floating in and out of the group at my leisure – sharing social time when I wanted it or going solo.

Aside from enjoying a real vacation, the enrichment of my trip came in having to face newly discovered anxiety about diving. I was 26 when I last used SCUBA gear, and I don't remember feeling hesitant. I just went for it and didn't think much about the potential dangers. This time I found myself feeling acutely vulnerable. I was not at all interested in inhaling water, swimming far below the surface from a natural source of air, having nitrogen bubbles forming in my blood stream, or meeting creatures in the ocean larger than myself. I felt so nervous the first day, I was looking for excuses to avoid the dive shop. My fear was so blatantly apparent I knew if I kept avoiding it, I would have felt ashamed of myself. So, first thing in the morning I went straight in, introduced myself to the staff who quickly outfitted me with gear and had us in the boat headed to the reef within the hour.



It's always great people that make any experience so rich. This was no exception. The dive team was not only professional and alert, but also very kind, generous and very easy to laugh — poking fun at one another and endlessly joking. They could tell I was scared, but didn't make me feel ridiculous. They were great coaches, conveying confidence in my ability and going over everything as much as I needed. Well, at first I have to say that Dive Master Di, a salty Brit, was a bit intimidating at first with her seriousness about listening to her every word about safety and protocol, which I was actually grateful for. She softened up over time, but I really didn't want to make any silly mistakes. By my second day of diving, we were enjoying happy hour together, so it didn't take long for her to share her soft side.

I don't think I will be able to describe in words how amazing the diving was. It is such an otherworldly experience. The water was amazingly clear, and the creatures so nonchalant toward our presence. The reef is famous for the coral and other colorful creatures, but I didn't know how exotic sponges can be. Sponges! The sea fans waving in the current, and the giant green eels, thick as the Sunday Post with their serious under-bite swimming right below me, thousands of silver fish swimming as one, the sea turtles flying by, the eagle ray circling around as if in a fashion show, the unimpressed barracuda — also with under-bite issues, and the ginormous grouper with their spots and ultra fat lips, all dazzled and amazed the audience.



The underwater show didn't really become that apparent to me until my 3rd dive when I finally relaxed enough to really take notice of my surroundings. I stopped constantly checking my air and depth gauges, stopped thinking about my breathing pattern, and stopped using my hands to swim. By my 4th dive, I was actually, truly looking forward to going down again. It began to feel natural while I experimented with swimming upside down, backwards, letting the current take me, swimming through narrow spaces, facing barracuda without in increase in

my heart rate, and controlled by buoyancy without much thought. I got to the point where I was actually looking forward to seeing a hammerhead shark – something common in the water there. I realized since the turtles, barracuda, eels didn't care about my presence, the sharks wouldn't either.

In all, I dove 12 times, twice a day for six days straight. I made friends with the dive master, the boat driver, my diving buddy who happened to be on the yoga retreat, six other young women, the owner of the resort, the wait staff, and the chef. It was a fabulous week! Thank you PTD Committee!

