

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 recipient of the Polly T. Donald Enrichment Fund was Melanie Leggett. Her story about how she used her awards follows below.

Melanie Leggett

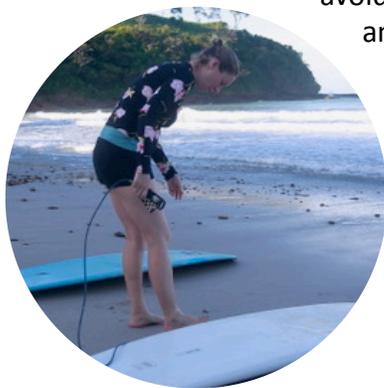
Director of Admissions

This year I was the lucky recipient of the Polly T. Donald Enrichment Fund award. For those of you unfamiliar with this fund, it was created in May of 2011 as a tribute to our former head. The purpose of the award is to "provide a unique opportunity for all faculty and staff to revitalize and grow outside the classroom." In my opinion, it is one of the many ways in which Friends School lives up to its vision – particularly the part about nurturing spirits. My spirit is nurtured in so many ways by being a part of this community, and this trip was truly the icing on the cake.

In my application for the fund, I referenced the challenges I've had with nurturing my spirit in the last few years. I'm sure these challenges (a full-time career, a young child, being too busy) are familiar to many of you in your own lives. I'm incredibly grateful for my career and family, but the constant busy-ness can be overwhelming. My hope for applying to the fund was to have the opportunity to spend a week immersing myself in a few of my long-lost loves – exercise, nature, adventure, and friendship - in the form of a week-long surf retreat.



Upon receiving the award, I booked a retreat with a company called Chica Brava, based out of San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua. I also quickly found an adventure buddy – a good friend of mine who I know through my time working for the Women's Wilderness Institute back in the day in Boulder. Unfortunately, almost immediately after booking everything, Nicaragua fell into a time of extreme civil unrest. I spent endless hours researching and debating the safety of traveling to Nicaragua at this time (and was fully supported by the PTD committee to change plans if needed), but ultimately decided to stick with the plan with some changes to our itinerary to avoid any dangerous areas. In the end, it was a decision that paid off – we felt very safe and taken care of, and were happy to support a town that has seen its thriving tourism economy decimated by the decisions of its government. We were also often the only surfers in the line-up, which is very sad for San Juan del Sur, but the stuff dreams are made of for beginner surfers.



In a trip full of amazing experiences, there were two major highlights for me – the place, and the surf. San Juan del Sur is a neat little town, but the house and land that we stayed on, called Finca las Nubes (Cloud Farm), was truly unforgettable. I will never forget arriving to the property, after over a day of travel,

and driving through the dark for miles into the jungle until we arrived at our beautiful glowing little house, with the most incredible view I've ever seen of the ocean and town below. Finca las Nubes is a 240-acre nature reserve and working organic farm, and for me, was an unanticipated highlight of my week. All of the food we ate was grown on the property, we had an amazing horseback ride/tour through the farm, and I saw my first sloth! There was also an international preschool through elementary school on the grounds full of wild little ex-pat surfer kids.... school goals! I'm sure as parents all of you can appreciate how incredible it was to sleep through the night uninterrupted for a week straight, and have delicious meals cooked for me and coffee waiting each morning when I woke up. I felt like a straight up adventure princess as I sipped my coffee by the pool with monkeys swinging in the trees overhead (we won't talk about the bugs).



The second highlight, and true purpose of the trip for me, was the surfing. I've had lots of amazing adventures and mis-adventures over the years with

learning to surf, but in the past few years, had mostly experienced discouragement mixed with moments of terror as I followed my husband into one break after another that I probably had no business being at. For this trip I was ready to get back to basics, and have teachers and support. I couldn't have been happier with the surfing we experienced – perfect glassy waves that were easy to access, uncrowded, and big enough that I was challenged without being terrified. Our instructors were safe and

encouraging, and for the first time in years, I had an absolute blast *and* actually felt myself improving. It was really amazing to spend a week feeling like my old strong and adventurous self – I missed that person!



There were so many more special pieces to this trip for me – the friendships and laughter, the Spanish practice, living through my first nights away from my daughter.... the list could go on and on. I am so thankful to Friends, and to the Polly T. Donald Fund committee for allowing me this amazing opportunity. Thank you Friends School for always filling my bucket!

