

# 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 teachers Hetta Towler and Caroline Long. Their stories about how they used their awards follow below.

## Hetta Towler

### Preschool Teacher

This past summer I was fortunate enough to go on a four-day women's sea kayaking and yoga trip in the San Juan Islands with the money I was awarded from the PTD fund. I am so grateful for this opportunity and the many ways it enriched my spirit.

I discovered a love for sea-kayaking. The rhythm and predictability of paddling made me feel secure and present. To garner the most power, you and your partner had to be in-sync with your paddling and communication. My partner and I found a slow and steady paddle that kept us going even when we were sopping wet, cold and getting tossed around in the waves.

During the retreat we forest bathed on Jones Island. Well, you may ask, what is forest bathing? Forest bathing is a way to connect with nature through meditative walking and sitting practices that are guided in a forest. Forest Therapy originated in Japan in the 1980s as a way to support people's health and wellness due to higher levels of stress in society. The practice invites you to relax into nature through your senses.

Throughout the practice, Irene, our guide, would invite us to notice our surroundings: "I wonder what it feels like to have the earth support you"; "I wonder if the forest can hear your heartbeat"; and "I wonder what the forest smells like." She led us through several meditation practices inviting us to walk slowly through the woods, befriend a tree, and breathe in the forest air. We ended the forest bathing session with a tea ceremony. The tea was made from the Madrona tree bark.



During the four days in the San Juan Islands, I encountered and was nourished by the 5 Chinese Elements: water, fire, metal, earth and wood.

- The **water** element is connected to our emotions of fear and courage, and our kidneys. Being on the water taught me to surrender to the flow, let go and ride the waves.
- The **fire** element is connected to our hearts and the emotions of joy



and happiness. The fire warmed our bodies after a long day of paddling, and cooked our delicious meals. I dedicated my practice/retreat to the Sun.

- The element of **metal** is connected to our lungs and the energy of grief. The crisp forest air filled our bodies while practicing yoga on the shoreline and in the woods.
- The element of **wood** is connected to our energetic system and compassion. The forest bathing practice connected me more than ever to the natural world through my senses of touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste.
- The **earth** element is connected to our stomach and feelings of transformation. The earth provided a sense of grounding after a long day on the sea and held my physical body as I practiced yoga on the shoreline.



What has stayed with me from this magical voyage is a mindfulness practice to support my presence and compassion, recognizing the healing power of time spent in nature, and the strength and courage I carry within myself.

**Tower of Strength Song**—we sang this song on the last day as we paddled back home. *“I am a tower of strength within and without I am a tower of strength within. I let all burdens fall from my shoulders and all anxiety slip from my mind.”*

## **Caroline Long** Elementary School Teacher

Last summer my family and I were lucky enough to benefit from the PTDFund. After the newborn stage and the struggles of our first year as working parents, we needed fun and adventure. We needed to learn that just because we had a child, it didn't mean we had to stop exploring and getting lost in new places.

Katie hit the road with our two dogs and drove cross-country. A few days later, Gresham and I boarded the airplane to Pennsylvania where we would start our journey north. We ventured to Maine to spend a few days on my sister's farm and reconnected with two of my siblings and their families. After a few days in New England, the real adventure began. We left the dogs in Maine and headed north to Canada!

Our time in Canada was all about trying new things, getting lost, immersing ourselves in local culture and relaxing. With our matching bikes and Burley (generously gifted to us by a Friends School Family), we spent much of our time exploring the extensive bike trails on Prince Edward Island and in Mahone Bay/Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. We ate lots of lobster and PEI mussels. We also ate lots of ice cream and some of the best cheese and butter we have ever had. We pretended to be Anne of Green Gables and spent



time exploring places that inspired one of my favorite books from childhood. I didn't set up my cell phone on an international plan and it was so nice to truly disconnect from the real world for two weeks.



We traveled to Canada in June, which turned out to be a great time to travel there. It was right before peak tourist season. The locals were excited to see our little family from Colorado and happy to have visitors. Everyone we met was extremely friendly and generously shared information about local spots to go. We found a long beach with shallow water “warm” enough for our water-loving baby and myself to enjoy. At one restaurant, the owners’ little girls took a liking to Gresham and invited her to play so we could enjoy an adult meal.

We ended our trip in New Brunswick at St. Andrews By The Sea. It was foggy and cold and utterly perfect. We splashed in the indoor pool and played with hotel dogs. We ran in the rain and looked for whales. We wrapped up our tour of delicious seafood eating and packed our truck to head back south.

Our journey to Canada gave us a renewed sense of adventure. It gave us the confidence we needed as parents to get out and go see the world with our little girl. Everywhere we went we told people we were on a trip that my school was helping fund. People couldn't believe that I worked somewhere that gave teachers money to take care of and grow themselves. We were constantly reminded of how lucky we are to be a part of this unique and amazing community at Friends!

