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# Lamorinda Schools

## Applying to College

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

As the Class of 2009 works its way toward graduation, and transforms itself into next year's fall freshmen at institutions around the country, these seniors are tackling their college applications. This effort adds an additional layer of stress to an already jammed senior calendar. I want to offer some tips and strategies I give my own clients for preparing their applications. By now I assume that the college list is virtually complete. It is important to keep in mind that preparing a college application is a lot of work; there is no getting around that. Follow these guidelines and your task will be easier.

Do not procrastinate! First, figure out exactly what each college's application process is (deadlines, number of letters of recommendation, essay requirements). Next, make a time line for precisely what needs to be done and by when. Plan to meet all deadlines well ahead of time. Procrastination can result in missed opportunities, such as when a favorite teacher turns down your request to write your letter of recommendation because you asked too late.

File electronically. The actual process of filing an application is quite simple now that most colleges accept electronic submissions. Word processing has made revising essays and applications far easier than in your parents' day; you can update and edit your application right up until the time of submission.

Be neat and complete! It is difficult to condense yourself into the small boxes on an application, and it is easy to make errors. Before you hit the "submit" key, be sure to double check everything for completeness and accuracy. Careless errors tarnish an otherwise strong application, and can reflect poorly on the applicant. Remember, the electronic world can make things less complex, but cut and paste features also make it easier to make mistakes. It is not a good idea for an admissions officer at Carleton College to read that you are excited about attending Reed!

Write an effective essay. This topic was covered in October (to read, visit the Lamorinda archives at www.lamorindaweekly.com); here I will add just a few guidelines. Never let anyone, however well-intentioned, write any part of your essay. First, it is unethical and, second, those who read applications are skilled at distinguishing a student's voice. Some colleges, if they are in doubt, will request a writing sample that has been graded at high school. Remember the SAT and ACT essays you wrote are also available to admissions officers. Finally, and most importantly, you deserve to know you are accepted at a college on your own merits.

Take advantage of appropriate help to support your essay writing. You can brainstorm ideas with others and get comments about rough drafts. It is best to ask someone who can be objective, like your

English teacher or school counselor. Help with final editing and proof-reading is also fine, and I strongly recommend it. Admissions officers know you have time to polish your essays and expect you will do so; it is a sign that you are taking your application to the school seriously.

Consider the Common Application. First, check to see if the schools you are applying to accept the common application. Hundreds of colleges now do. It was designed to simplify the admissions process. Go to www.commonapp.org for the latest information. Students sometimes ask me whether a college that maintains its own application, but gives students a choice about which to use, might prefer its own forms. Colleges pledge to treat all applications equally, and they keep that pledge. So the choice is entirely up to you.

Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. works as an independent college advisor in Lafayette. Dr. LaScala draws on 20 years of experience in higher education and research to customize the college search and admission process for students and their families. She has 3 daughters—one a graduate of Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo), one a sophomore at MIT and the youngest, a junior in high school. Dr. LaScala can be contacted at elizabeth@doingcollege.com or (925) 891-4491.

## Family Focus

### Increase in Anxiety Among Children and Teens

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

Teachers and health professionals have reported increased anxiety among children and teens in recent years, and I'm seeing it too. In many instances, there is a genetic predisposition for a child to develop anxiety. If you or anyone in your family suffers from anxiety-related conditions, your child may also be affected.

If your child exhibits any of the following behaviors for a lengthy period of time, it is important to seek help from your physician and then possibly a mental health professional: frequent nightmares and fear of being alone in her room at night; inability to fall asleep or go back to sleep if awakening in the middle of the night; sudden lack of concentration in school; compulsive thoughts or behavior (hair-pulling, body image and eating issues, cutting, etc.); or excessive worrying about safety for herself and her family.

Some cases of anxiety are less biologically-based and more situational, however. In our current national and world environment, even the calmest among us can be susceptible to bouts of anxiety. One seventeen year-old told me recently that he worries constantly about his future—getting into a good college, finding a satisfying job, being in an enduring relationship, and now more than ever, having the financial means to live a good life. He worries, too, about the environment and unsafe conditions in the world.

That's certainly a lot for a young person to carry around!

A twelve year-old girl confides about her worries for her parents' safety because they both travel a lot for work. She is an only child and is frequently left in the care of college-age babysitters during the week. Her family doesn't eat dinner together even when everyone is home. Her parents treat her more like a friend than a child. "Emily" likes to be treated like an equal, but in reality she suffers from not having enough emotional support and time with her parents. Because she was trying hard to suppress her worries, fears, and loneliness, Emily developed an anxiety disorder. Her anxiety attacks became more frequent and alarming, and struck without warning or explanation. Eventually, Emily asked her parents to obtain help for her.

If you see your child struggling with anxiety and feeling less in control, encourage her to share her thoughts and feelings with you. Your child may need more time to be with you and to have opportunities to talk. Find time to relax alone together in interactive ways, not just watching television or videos.

It can help your child to hear that a certain amount of worry and anxiety is perfectly natural and normal, and that she is not alone in feeling this way. And it is comforting for her to know that if she can't handle her feelings on her own, you will help in any way you can.

Try adding additional routines to family life. Children crave routine and certainty. It helps them feel safe. Even though they may complain about "Borinda" and "Boraga," a certain amount of predictability is reassuring. Continue to provide structure and limits for your child. Help her learn and practice relaxation techniques. Bring up changes or future events ahead of time to try to avoid upsetting surprises. And, as always, try to set a good example. If you have your own anxieties, manage them as best you can through increased exercise, meditation or yoga, healthy eating, finding support among friends and family, or possible therapy and/or medication.

When we travel on an airplane and experience unexpected turbulence, it is natural to watch the flight attendants to see how they are responding to the situation. We want to see them looking calm and relaxed so we can feel reassured. (We just hope they aren't being good actors!) Similarly, children look to us for cues on how to respond to certain situations. Like a virus, anxiety can be transmitted back and forth among family members. By being observant and responsive, you can help your child learn to manage her anxiety.

Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or www.margieryserson.com

## Troop 212 to Honor Tom "Mac" McIntosh – "A Man Among Boys"

Submitted by Trish Piatt



Tom Macintosh Photo provided

Tom "Mac" McIntosh, assumed leadership of Troop 212 in Moraga for what he thought would be a four-year commitment. Thirty-seven years later, Mac is

stepping down as scoutmaster and leaving a lasting impression on the lives of hundreds of young men, sons and grandsons included. Mac dedicated his adult

life to mentoring young boys while honing their transformation into confident, self-assured leaders. More than 250 of these young men attained Eagle Scout, the highest award scouting has to offer, and many have gone on to leadership roles of their own.

With the scouts, Mac has accrued a travelogue that would make many seasoned travelers green with envy: backpacking in the high Sierras, the Grand Canyon, British Columbia, New Mexico, and the Yukon Territory of Canada; biking in Oregon, Canada, and Bavaria; canoeing on the Yukon River in Alaska, the Green River in Utah, and the Bowron Lakes of Northern British Columbia.

For his scouting services, Mac has received many distinguished awards including the Silver Beaver Award and the BSA Distinguished Citizen Award, both from the Mt. Diablo Silverado Council. He was the recipient of Moraga's Citizen of the Year Award in 1995 and The National Presbyterian God and Service Award.

Mac has a favorite proverb that he feels sums up what he and the troop are all about: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." Mac says, "For over thirty-seven years I have had the pleasure and honor of working with some fine men and enjoying the company of some outstanding boys, men and women – a marvelous blessing."

Fortunately for the boys in Troop 212, the energetic 78 year old Mac plans to stay active in troop activities. He is determined not to retire, but only to pass the reigns to the next leader, Rainer "Rhino" Del Valle, who was himself a Troop 212 Eagle.

Those associated with Troop 212, past and present, feel the pleasure and honor have been theirs. A Tribute Reception to honor Mac for his dedication and service to the troop will be held on Saturday, November 29, from 2:30-5:00pm at the Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church.

## Taylor Boulevard Clean Up



Photo provided

Michael Inerra says that when the City of Lafayette didn't respond to his request to clean up Taylor Boulevard, he took the matter into his own hands. Inerra approached the Peter Pan Foundation (a local non-profit) and local kids to volunteer their time to help clean up the street. Springbrook Pool (at which Mr. Inerra is President) donated its dumpster to dispose of the refuse. Thanks to their efforts, Taylor is looking clean and green

## Meet the Author at Sleepy Hollow

By Jean Follmer



Elizabeth Ellison reading to students Photo provided

Sleepy Hollow Elementary School will host author and former Orinda resident Elizabeth Stow Ellison on November 19 at 6:30 pm. Ellison will be on hand to present and discuss her new book, Flight.

Flight is about a family struggling with the hidden illiteracy of their son, Evan, who is a freshman in high school. The story is nar-

rated from the point-of-view of Evan's twelve year-old sister and is set in Orinda. "I want Flight to be a message to all readers that they too can take flight from whatever it is that's holding them back in their lives," said Ellison.

Ellison attended school in Orinda until she moved to Southern California at age nine. "It was in Miss Hanson's third grade class at

Glorietta Elementary School where I began my writing career, though I didn't know it at the time. We just wrote a lot and I loved it."

In addition to being an author, Ellison is a 5th grade teacher. Ellison looks forward to returning home to Orinda. "I have lived in many areas, but Orinda had a significant impact on me. I attended Glorietta and even as a young child I knew that I was getting the best education. The teachers and the community as a whole are so invested in their children. Orinda made such an impression on me as a child that I had no doubts about setting my novel in that town. I am so pleased to have this opportunity to share my novel with Orinda," said Ellison.

The Sleepy Hollow event is free and is open to the public. Ellison will also be at Orinda Books for a book signing on November 22 at 3:00 pm. For more information about Elizabeth Stow Ellison, visit her website at www.elizabethstow-ellison.com.

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## Burton Valley Elementary School's Walk a Thon



Red Ribbon Week Walk-a-thon at Burton Valley Elementary School. Pictured from left to right are Walk-a-thon co-chair Alyse Pellegrini, Katja Brewer, Sarah Shipway and co-chair Tracy Brewer