

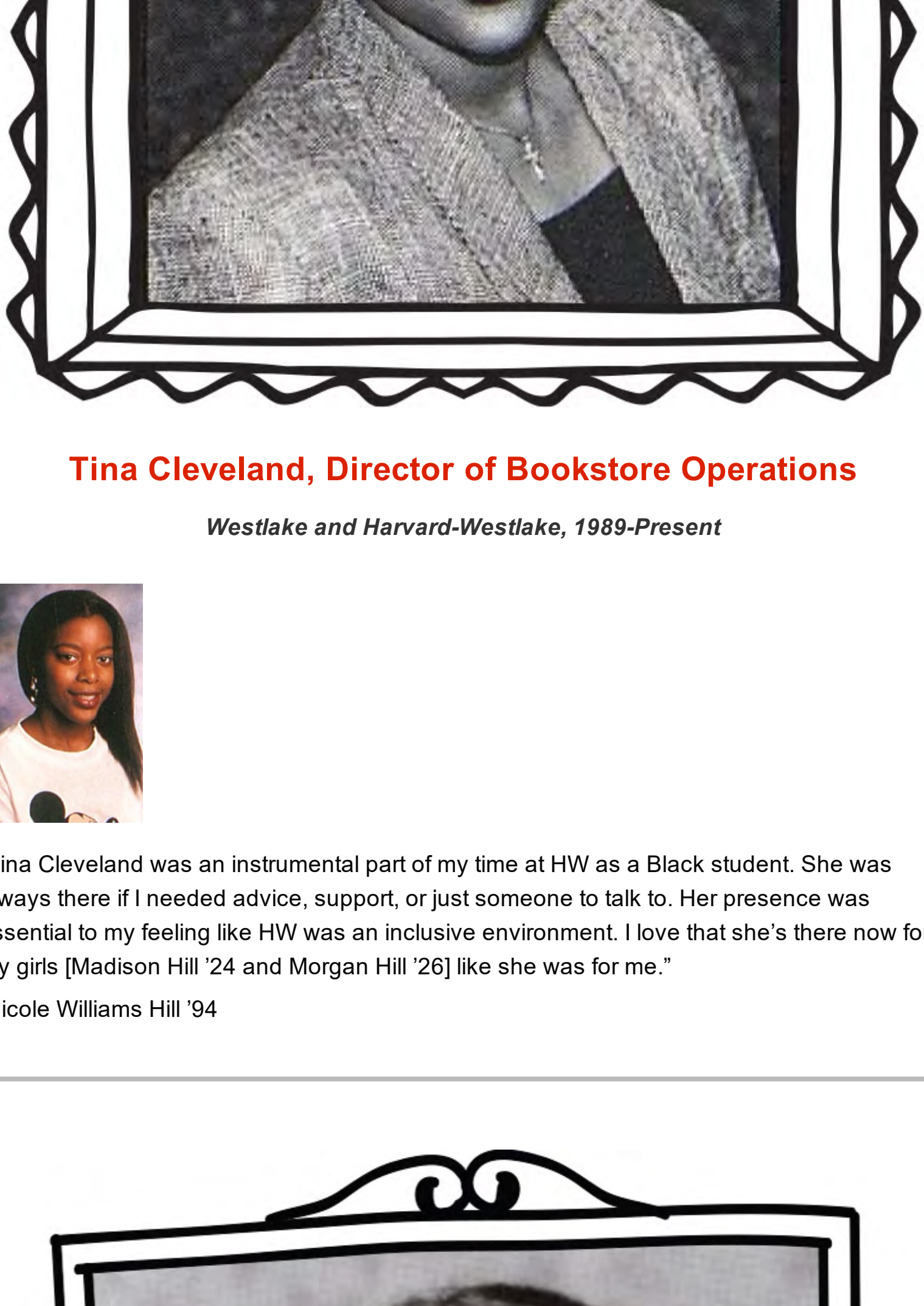
Life

HARVARD-WESTLAKE

In this season of gratitude, take a moment to reflect on the people who have shaped your life. If a favorite teacher, coach, or staff member came to mind, you aren't alone. Here, we share tributes from Harvard, Westlake, and Harvard-Westlake alumni going back decades. Who helped you become who you are? Let me (and them!) know

Happy Thanksgiving! | Ed Hu | Head of External Relations | ehu@hw.com

Honoring your favorite faculty and staff members



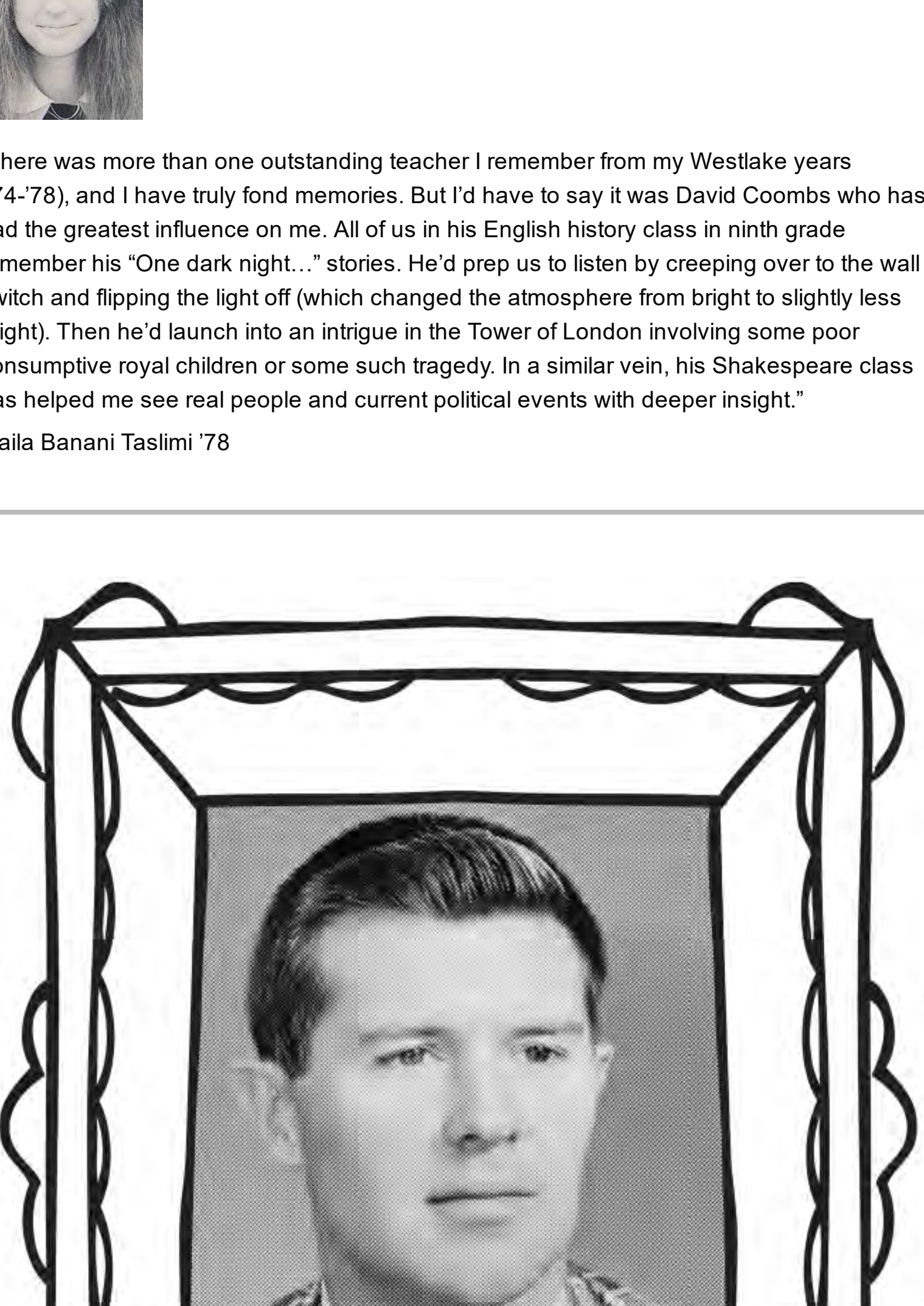
Tina Cleveland, Director of Bookstore Operations

Westlake and Harvard-Westlake, 1989-Present



"Tina Cleveland was an instrumental part of my time at HW as a Black student. She was always there if I needed advice, support, or just someone to talk to. Her presence was essential to my feeling like HW was an inclusive environment. I love that she's there now for my girls [Madison Hill '24 and Morgan Hill '26] like she was for me."

Nicole Williams Hill '94



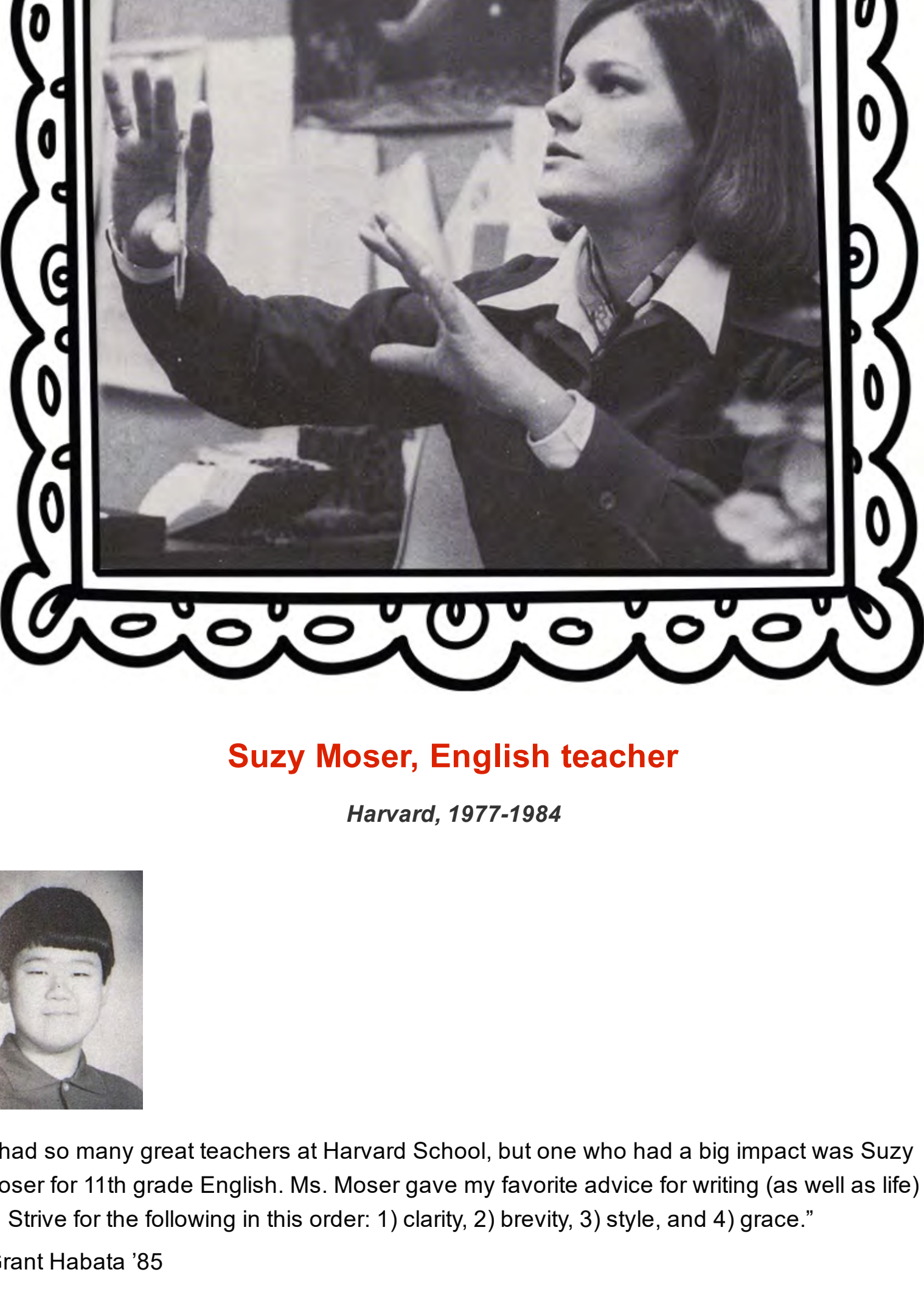
David Coombs, Social Studies/History and English Teacher

Westlake and Harvard-Westlake, 1968-2008



"There was more than one outstanding teacher I remember from my Westlake years ('74-'78), and I have truly fond memories. But I'd have to say it was David Coombs who has had the greatest influence on me. All of us in his English history class in ninth grade remember his "One dark night..." stories. He'd prep us to listen by creeping over to the wall switch and flipping the light off (which changed the atmosphere from bright to slightly less bright). Then he'd launch into an intrigue in the Tower of London involving some poor consumptive royal children or some such tragedy. In a similar vein, his Shakespeare class has helped me see real people and current political events with deeper insight."

Laila Banani Taslimi '78



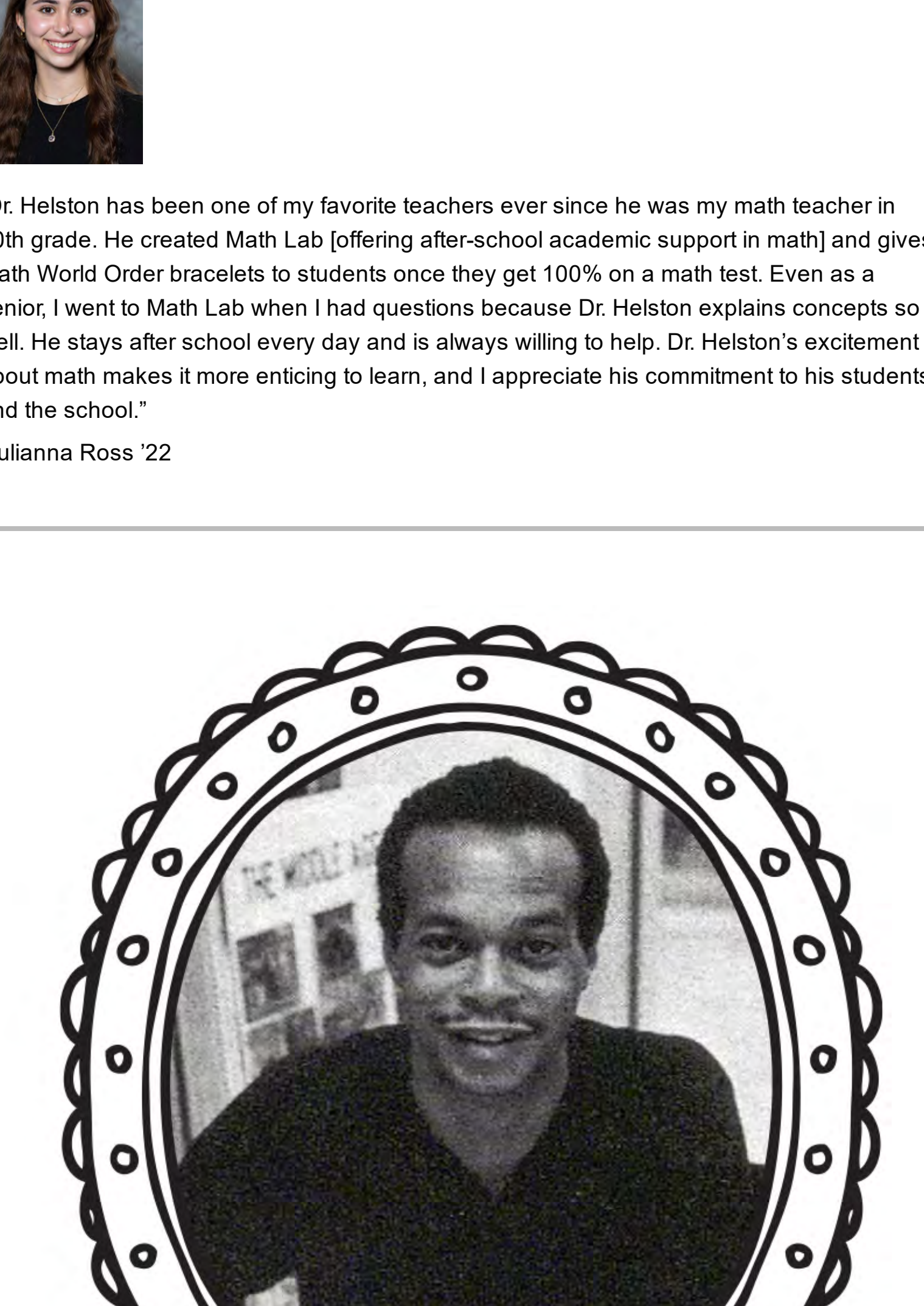
Daniel T. McFadden, Basketball Coach and History Teacher

Harvard, 1977-1984



"Dan McFadden was much more than my basketball coach. He taught me many important lessons that have stayed with me throughout my life. My three years under his usually stern guidance taught me to never be complacent or feel comfortably satisfied with what came too easily. Rather, he pushed me hard to become more mentally tough and find the best effort that I had within me. His was an intense crucible in which to exist. But if you could survive the physical and mental challenges he put forth, you came out a stronger person in the end. He changed my life and I am forever grateful for the gifts he provided that went far beyond lessons on the basketball court."

Richard Rand '73



Suzy Moser, English teacher

Harvard, 1977-1984



"I had so many great teachers at Harvard School, but one who had a big impact was Suzy Moser for 11th grade English. Ms. Moser gave my favorite advice for writing (as well as life) ... Strive for the following in this order: 1) clarity, 2) brevity, 3) style, and 4) grace."

Grant Habata '85



Josh Helston, Math Teacher

Harvard-Westlake, 2018-Present

"Dr. Helston has been one of my favorite teachers ever since he was my math teacher in 10th grade. He created Math Lab [offering after-school academic support in math] and gives Math World Order bracelets to students once they get 100% on a math test. Even as a senior, I went to Math Lab when I had questions because Dr. Helston explains concepts so well. He stays after school every day and is always willing to help. Dr. Helston's excitement about math makes it more enticing to learn, and I appreciate his commitment to his students and the school."

Julianna Ross '22

John T. West III, English Teacher, Dean, and Assistant Head of the Upper School

Harvard and Harvard-Westlake, 1975-2003

"I studied ninth grade English with John West 40 years ago. He was an exquisite teacher and the first person to show me what happens when critical reading and passionate reading combine. So much flowed from his decades of engagement with the braided worlds of philosophy and mythopoetics and artmaking. Thanks to Mr. West, I grasped for the first time that to make art is to practice one's own humanness profoundly. The memory of certain classes he taught brings special joy. He was not only a brilliant scholar but also a professional dancer, and he broke down the barrier between mind and body to reveal what full creative learning could be. Some days he wrote on the chalkboard in advance and announced that he would teach with his hands behind his back ... and commence to literally dance the teaching, using his toes to point to words and phrases as they came forward in the discussion. It was an astonishing blessing to have learned from and with John West in those formative years."

Jason Francisco '85



Rose Taylor, English Teacher

Westlake, 1972-1980



"Ms. Taylor was my seventh grade English teacher. As a former nun, she was very strict and ran a tight ship. Most of us were terrified of disappointing her. That said, her showing us how to properly diagram a sentence, write an essay well, and understand the nuances of the English language were invaluable. Her lessons helped me later in college, on job applications, etc. As the teacher who most impacted me, she was the recipient of my rose during the Senior Rose Ceremony. I will be forever in her debt!"

Jennifer Barth Perry '81



Joe Medina, Photography Teacher and Middle School Visual Arts Department Head

Harvard-Westlake, 2010-Present



"Mr. Joe Medina provided me with unparalleled support for my photography and constant artistic inspiration. He is always challenging his students in meaningful and insightful ways. He gives you honest criticism followed up with incredible advice to transform a project. I will never forget my first year at Harvard-Westlake when I took a quick picture on my phone and showed it to Mr. Medina. He loved the picture and told me to last-minute submit it to the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. That picture earned me a Gold Key and I went to New York for the award ceremony, which became the launching point for my artistic expression (and I just graduated from college with a minor in photography). Mr. Medina, you are an incredible artist, teacher, and friend. Thank you for always inspiring me."

Kate von Mende '18

Do you have your own favorite teacher, coach, or staff member you'd like to thank?

We'd love to hear your memories of a Harvard, Westlake, or Harvard-Westlake faculty or staff member who had a positive impact on you.

[Tell us about your favorite](#)

Check out past issues of HW Life!

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