

ENVOY

A PUBLICATION OF THE TOWNSEND HARRIS ALUMNI
ASSOCIATION



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THHS UPDATES

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2022!

- THHS seniors earned their diplomas on June 23, 2022.
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- The THHS Wind Ensemble won first place at the Music in the Parks high school high school concert band competition in Silver Springs, Maryland.
 - The THHS Period Club held a rally for menstrual rights in front of THHS. Congresswoman Grace Meng spoke. English Teacher and club advisor Katherine Lipinski organized the event with her club leaders. Ms. Fee and Ms. Assante both spoke at the rally as well.
 - The Humanities Symposium, Athletics Awards, and Keepers' Day all returned in person for the first time since 2019.
 - Ms. Assante, Ms. Figelman, and Ms. Carter were all honored at a year end faculty celebration in June. Each are retiring from THHS after years of service.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: ERIKA MATOS

Tell me a little about yourself.

My name is Erika Matos and I'm Townsend Harris class of 2006. I'm a speech language pathologist and I currently work in the school system. I was born and raised in Queens all my life...except for the two years that I lived in Japan, teaching English. In terms of hobbies, uhm, knitting is probably my number one hobby; I'm actually doing it as we speak. I feel like that's pretty much all about me!

How did you end up at Townsend Harris?

When I was in middle school my mom really wrestled with where to send me to high school. My brothers went to the same high school and all my mom knew was that she didn't want to send me there. So at a parent-teacher conference, she asked my history

teacher if he had any recommendations and he recommended Townsend Harris. He talked about the school, and he said he felt like it was a good fit for me. So when we got the high school catalog, we looked it up and it looked great. I didn't know what Humanities was all about, but I was interested, and I applied as my first choice. Then I got in.

What is the greatest lesson you learned at THHS?

I feel like it was to keep an open mind. I mean high school was my first time traveling to another part of Queens. I met so many people from different ethnicities [and] different religious backgrounds. I remember seeing Flushing for the first time and being shocked, like "Where are we? This is Queens. It looks like we're in Chinatown." That was my only frame of reference...So dumb. [But] I made so many friends from all different backgrounds and I got exposed to so much; it really opened up my world. I kept joining things that I would have never figured I'd pick for myself and everything I did was just met with so much encouragement and openness. I felt like I was really able to grow as a person and it really helped me line up my sights for the future and what I wanted to do.



Erika Matos
THHS Class of '06

Townsend Harris is where I heard about the JET program, which is a program to teach English in Japan and once I heard about it, I knew that that's what I wanted to do. One of the requirements is you have to have a bachelor's degree; so I knew I was going to go to college and then I was going to do the JET program and that's what I ended up doing. That experience seriously changed my life. I still feel like it was yesterday, even though it was ten years ago. I seriously think about it every day and none of that would have been possible if I didn't go to Townsend Harris. It just really changed everything for me.

Is there any teacher that greatly influenced you during your time at Townsend Harris?

Mrs. Michlewitz sure did. I don't really ever do a good job of keeping in touch with people, unfortunately, but I feel like looking back, she just always encouraged us and believed in us and I always really thrived on that kind of attention. I thrive on positive feedback and I felt like that's what she always gave me and so I feel like all of the growing that I did in my time there was partly because of her constant encouragement.

Where has life taken you since Townsend Harris?

I never really intended to get into speech. I feel like it kind of happened accidentally. Right when I got to Japan, I had an experience with teaching students English pronunciation for a speech contest. I had taken ... Linguistics 101 in my last semester of undergrad and so I was kind of like "Well, how do you teach someone to make sounds that don't exist in their language?" And that led me down this path and that experience really stuck with me.

The first student that I worked with placed in this contest and that was really shocking to me because I had only been working there for a month and she was brand new to the experience as a freshman. But it stuck with me that she always like appreciated the effort I put into teaching her, and she always used the tips from our English lessons.

Originally, I wanted to be a translator, but once I came back to Japan I realized that that kind of job wasn't for me. So, I thought about my work experiences—my time in Japan—and I realized that I really liked being able to teach people how to communicate, regardless of what language they spoke or their background.

And that's what got me into speech therapy. I really liked working with students. I've always enjoyed working in the school system. When I was in undergrad, I was also able to be a fencing referee so I was always visiting Townsend Harris. Mrs. Michlewitz encouraged me to referee. I was terrified of it but she pushed me towards it, and I did it for a number of years.

I loved talking to the students before or after the meets and just listening to their

conversations and getting to know them. So when I was deciding what population to work with, I was like, "I think I'd rather stay in the school system instead of going off to a hospital or a nursing home." So that's where I've been working for three years as a speech therapist and I really enjoy it.

What do you miss most about THHS?

Oh my gosh, I miss the sense of camaraderie. There's something so nice about going somewhere and where everyone calls you by name. That's how I felt walking into our 10-year reunion. I couldn't go to the five year because I was in Japan but I went to the 10-year reunion and I walked into the room and everyone was like "Hey Erica!" and I'm just like, "Oh my gosh!"

Because I work in a high school, I think about Townsend Harris a lot. I do a lot of comparing and contrasting like seeing my students' high school experiences and comparing it to my own. We really had a sense of community that I feel not a lot of schools have. It was just so welcoming and people were so kind. I think that's the number one thing I miss.

How have you implemented the sentiment of the Ephebic Oath into your life since graduating?

I do think I've [absorbed and internalized] the Ephebic Oath. Something that I really love about where I work now is that I'm actually working in the same school district that I went to school in, which I think is crazy. I feel like living here, you know, being born and raised here, going to school here. and now working here gives me a lot of perspective that not every teacher or administrator has. And so, I feel like of all the places that I could be in New York City, in our state, in our country...and I'm here helping students like myself. I just feel really proud to be a part of this community and to be doing what I do.

What advice would you give to current THHS students?

I would say keep an open mind as you go through your high school experience and beyond; you might end up somewhere you never thought. You might be doing the opposite of what you intended but I feel like with life, you kind of just have to experiment. Try new things to see what it is that you really enjoy and what it is that you really want to do with your life.

How can other alumni and current THHS students connect with you? Do you have a LinkedIn or website you are willing to share?

My LinkedIn account is probably the best way to reach me. It's just my name.

THAA UPDATES

- The Class of 2017 is having their five-year reunion on August 13, 2022. If you are a member of the Class of 2017, you can buy your ticket here:

https://thaa.org/event_detail.html?newsid=3599

- Have questions? Reach out to Jillissa Drayton at jed510@stern.nyu.edu



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