

ENVOY

A PUBLICATION OF THE TOWNSEND HARRIS ALUMNI
ASSOCIATION



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THHS UPDATES

- In early January, the school welcomed Violetta Kurayeva as the new school nurse. The previous nurse, Linda Carter, retired from THHS last year.
- Students danced in FON 2023 on March 10 and 11. There were four performances and multiple new/revived FONs including Tibetan FON, Italian FON, and Jewish FON.
- THHS hosted the New York Muslim Interscholastic Tournament (MIST) this year. Harrislam won multiple awards, and junior Sadeea Morshed won first in the “overall competitor” category. No other student has ever won the top prize two years in a row, as Sadeea did.
- As students signed up for new electives this month, Mr. Condon introduced the “Writers Academy,” a new special program within THHS that will allow students to join courses, professional experiences, and activities that help develop their writing. There are three sequences now offered: a journalism sequence offered with a connection to The Classic, a drama writing sequence offered with a connection to the school’s theater program, and a creative writing sequence offered with a connection to the school’s new publishing house, The Starling Press.
- A HUGE Congratulations to Kylie Chiang, Melissa Nakos, and Arlene Laverde! THHS created the Ezra Jack Keats Bookmaking borough winning book, *The Little Things* by Kylie Chiang. All books will be on display at the Central Branch, Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) at 10 Grand Army Plaza from May 2 to May 31, 2023.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: EVELYN GONG

Evelyn Gong is a longtime Northeast Queens resident and member of the class of 1998. She is a lawyer, law school professor, mentor, community volunteer, defender of voting rights and advocate for children. She earned her undergraduate degree from The University of Pennsylvania and her law degree from St. John's University, where she now serves as an adjunct professor. Currently, Evelyn is running for Queens Civil Court Judge in the 6th Municipal Court District (Northeast Queens) to focus her public service work on creating a more just judicial system for all Queens residents. Evelyn's election would be historic as the first woman of color elected as judge in the district. She is endorsed by the Queens Democratic Party and Democratic elected officials.



Evelyn Gong
THHS Class of '98

How did you end up at Townsend?

I don't remember how I heard about Townsend Harris, but I knew that I did not want to commute to another borough in order to go to school. And my father worked at Queens College at the time, and I had a lot of experience with Queens College because my siblings, my cousins, and I went to music school and summer camp at Queens College. We also had swim lessons there. We had a lot of activities centered around the school because it offered a lot to the community and my father worked there. So it just made sense for someone who didn't want to commute and who liked the humanities to go to Townsend Harris as opposed to any other school. And I didn't want to go to my zoned school. I wanted a school with more academic rigor. Townsend Harris just made sense for me.

What is the greatest lesson you learned during your time at Townsend Harris?

I learned many lessons at Townsend Harris, academically, and in other ways, including

socially and even physically (think gym class!), that have made me a more well-rounded person. It would be difficult to pinpoint one lesson as greater than any other; when I look back at the lessons from Townsend Harris, I think of the culmination of lessons that contributed to my growth.

Is there any teacher that you can remember that influenced you during your time at Townsend?

I actually really enjoyed Latin and I had a teacher named Mrs. Landry. I think she retired a while back, but I actually had her for every single semester that I took Latin except for one semester. I really enjoyed her classes and one thing I really liked about her classes was that she always had a Latin phrase or motto that we would learn maybe like once a week, or on a regular basis. One that stuck with me was *ad astra per aspera*, which is ‘to the stars and beyond.’ And from time to time, since high school, I have thought about that, and it inspires me, in a sense, to reach higher and always strive to grow and reach greater heights and to be open to learning and to improvement. So that’s something that really stayed with me.

Is there anything that you took with you from Townsend that you think facilitated your career trajectory thus far?

I think one thing that I learned from my time at Townsend Harris was the mechanics of grammar in the [EG1] English language which has helped me throughout my academic and professional career. I gained a good foundation.

Is there anything that you took with you from Townsend that you think facilitated your career trajectory thus far?

So as a student that part of the Ephebic Oath [to leave one’s city no less but rather greater] actually did resonate with me and I held that value prior to starting at Townsend Harris.

Certainly, that value has stayed with me and I really appreciate that Townsend Harris really emphasized that and it was integral to the experience.

I went into the legal career with the desire to do public service, in other words, to serve the community, and I’ve built a legal career on that. Now I am running for judge so that I can focus my public service on a judicial system that reflects the community and shares its values. So in that way I am trying to fulfill that oath of making the city a better place. The specific judgeship that I am running for is New York City Civil court in Queens County. And so, that’s a City Court and specifically pertains to making my city a greater place.

And it’s *ad astra per aspera*, too, right? Because the work is never over. Even after I become a judge there’s still more that we can do and more that we should aim for.

Is there anything that you took with you from Townsend that you think facilitated your career trajectory thus far?

I think I miss the sense of wonder that I had. [I miss] learning about the world and having an

entire universe full of opportunities that were ahead of me. And I'm not saying that I don't still have that, but to be a younger person and to learn about the world from a classroom like that with wonderful teachers and wonderful students...[Townsend Harris] was such a wonderful place for learning. That kind of environment from which to view the world and start off with as a launching pad...There's a beauty in that which I appreciate.

What advice would you give to current students?

I think it's important to remember that it's OK to make mistakes and if you make a mistake, it's more about what you do to learn from the mistake. You can only grow when you make mistakes and learn from them. As a perfectionist, I have to remind myself of that all the time, but, you know, if I hadn't had my failures and my losses I would've been stagnant. I would've just stayed where I was and there isn't a path to growth if you don't have anything to learn from.

What advice would you give to current students?

That's a tough one. I've had judicial aspirations for quite some time now and something that I'm very proud of that happened very recently is that I got the endorsement of the Queens Democratic Party for my candidacy. That's something that I worked very hard towards and the hard work paid off.

Maybe this will inspire some of the students: I went to St. John's Law School and I'm actually an adjunct professor there now. But in my first semester of law school--well, first of all, first semester [of 1L] can be pretty scary--there was this hallway outside of some of the offices on the third floor. And there are basically like headshots of all the judges who graduated from St. John's Law School--and St. John's Law School produces a lot of judges. And they were all mostly older white men. And so I looked at the wall and I was like, "I would love to be a judge. I think I can do that, too. I think I can be on the wall one day."

And I thought to myself, you know, one day there's going to be another student here and that person's going to be looking at the wall and they're going to see my photo and they're going to be like, "Yeah, I can do that, too!" So that alone was one of the things that inspired me to take this path.

Actually, I would be the first Asian American woman from St. John's to become a judge. I'm not doing it for that, but if I were to be elected, that would be the case.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I would tell the students that you only get to be in high school once, so focus on your

priorities, which include academics, but also remember to make the most of your experience in other ways, too.

How can alumni learn more and support you?

The website for my campaign is www.gongforjudge.com and there you can learn more about my background, why I'm doing what I'm doing and why I am running for judge!



THAA Communications Committee

Jillissa Drayton

Selina Lee

Debra Michlewitz

Craig Slutzkin