

## In Loving Memory of Raquel Llera-Stern

12/06/1989 - 10/29/2021  
NS Alum 1994 - 2002

### Raquel and I at Neighborhood School

By Dominique Hall, NS Alum

Raquel and I were instant friends when we met in pre-school, and we bounced around when we learned we would be going to Neighborhood School together. So many in the NS community witnessed Raquel's gifts and passions that were nourished as she rose through Level 1 to 4 and continued to make her mark on this world. The pages of her journey are rich with an infinite passion for animals, patience for helping those in need, musical and theatrical talents, a genuine acceptance for others, an ability to bring comedy to all situations, and a distinct, infectious laugh.

Raquel did not just love animals, she recognized the importance of connection, contextualizing their biology in personal relationships with a menagerie of different creatures and tenderly rehabilitating those who were disregarded. She volunteered at sanctuaries, studied canine behavior, and started Raquel's Place for Dogs in western Mass. Always an artist, her beautiful voice became stronger as she grew up, and her abundant poetry became her song.

We sang NS tunes into our adulthood together, with the rounds being our favorite. "This pretty planet, spinning through space...." around, and around again.

## Common Cents

When we set a "reach" goal in fundraising, it's important to have everyone who loves NS on board! That's what is happening this year; we are "reaching" to raise \$190,000 (our highest amount ever) and participation is growing every day! As a result, we are less than \$25k away from accomplishing our goal by **May 31**.

Why are current families, former families, Alumni, and friends stepping up to help us?

- **51% of current families participate in Fair Share Tuition. 100% of current families benefit from an economically diverse school.**
- Student:Teacher ratio of 5:1 keeps learning personalized.
- NS teachers invest in students; families and friends invest in NS. We can count on one another.

At right are two ways for you to help us meet our May 31 goal.



*Friendship collage of some early NS memories shared by Raquel and Dominique alongside friends and their later hug at an NS reunion.*

♥ Join the We Love NS! campaign  
[givebutter.com/WeLoveNS](https://givebutter.com/WeLoveNS)

♥ Purchase tickets to our online viewing event, *BRAVE LIGHT*  
[givebutter.com/ZohxCf](https://givebutter.com/ZohxCf)

We ♥ NS!

# NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

Good News About Neighborhood Schools, Inc. Vol. 20, Issue 2 \* Spring 2022

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Grad Project Night**  
Thursday, May 26th  
6:30pm  
Forest Hills Covenant Church

**Graduation**  
Friday, June 10th  
6:30pm  
Forest Hills Covenant Church

**Last Day of School**  
**Boolie Day Celebration**  
Friday, June 17th  
Forest Hills Covenant Church



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and  
**Neighborhood School Alumni**

## BRAVE LIGHT

By Johnny Blazes  
*Drama, Rock Band & Rap Around Teacher*



Photo by Moses Mitchell, NS Parent

In the spring of 2021, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students of Neighborhood School's Level 4 created a video they called *A Message from the Future*, inspired by the two watercolor-and-narration videos of the same name created by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Molly Crabapple. Level 4's video evoked visions of a future where relationships between people are restored instead of broken, and the earth is allowed to heal itself. They saw huge changes to the systems we live within today: voting, policing, schooling, energy consumption, farming, economy.

That video was the seed from which *BRAVE LIGHT* grew. This year's Level 4 students imagined what characters might live in this bold future vision, what their personalities, strengths, and shortcomings might be. They told me how they saw themselves as similar or different from their characters and helped me shape the arc of the story with their own real questions about how we build a more just future. Rap Around and theater blended together as we asked hard questions like, "What does it feel like to make yourself vulnerable?" and, "What is justice?"

What I loved about *A Message from the Future* was that it didn't try to skip the hard stuff. "Things got worse before they got better."

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I know that many of us are scared of discomfort. I know I very often am. I want things to get better without first getting worse. But I also know that this is not the way of things. The Level 4 students – these young people who will be coming into their adulthood in 2035, the year when this play is set – foresaw big challenges for our country and our world. Their bravery, naming the fire that we will have to walk through in order to see radical change, inspired me to imagine the world of the play, just a little more than a decade in the future, when despite all the “worse” going on around them, the young people are ignited, are joyful, are willing to ask the hard questions.

#### **Parent Perspective and Appreciation from Heang Rubin**

*“I want to commend the students and staff of NS for producing such a beautiful, thought-provoking, and inspiring play this year. I, like so many other parents, was rendered speechless at the end of the play. The lessons that the play amplified about the urgency, potential, and challenges of restoration were extremely timely, given all the challenges that the pandemic and upsurge in racial violence has wrought on our society. It gave all of us food for thought that we will continue to meditate on, and it will challenge us to lean into our best selves. Like every play I have witnessed, NS students put their hearts and spirits into creating a play that uplifts all of us. ‘Brave Light’ was indeed a beacon of light during this challenging time. For me, the play marks the time two years ago when we went into lock-down, so what a gift it was to come back to together and celebrate the NS community and what it always offers our students, our families, and the broader community.”*

*I want to especially appreciate all the staff for their dedication and commitment, especially Johnny Blazes for their incredible directing; Mar Parilla for choreographing powerful dancing and drumming; Jai Underhill for her continued creative and careful attention to the costumes; and Samantha Hale for their amazing musical compositions”.*

If you weren't able to see *BRAVE LIGHT* in person (or if you just want to re-experience the magic!) please visit: [neighborhoodschooljp.org/brave-light-is-still-shining/](https://neighborhoodschooljp.org/brave-light-is-still-shining/)



Photo by Moses Mitchell, NS Parent

# BRAVE LIGHT Moments



Photos by Moses Mitchell, NS Parent

## BRAVE LIGHT Creative Team Interviews

By Gavin Thomas, *NS Parent*

For the full interview, visit: [neighborhoodschooljp.org/news/](http://neighborhoodschooljp.org/news/)



### **Jai Johnson Underhill, NS Art Teacher & Costume Designer for *BRAVE LIGHT***

I feel like I like to slip into the background. I'm facilitating them getting what they need, but I really want them to go after it themselves, and that was my experience this year; that gave me a lot of joy. I've been trying for many years to get the kids to have sort of an autonomous relationship with their artwork and their expression, and this year was the closest thing I've seen. We worked together on their costumes, and I let them lead me in knowing who their character was and what they thought they needed, and I helped just a little bit: things that I could suggest that they may not have known about but they agreed, "Yes this really helps, thank you."

I usually take the week after the play off, and I did that this year, and when I came back I'd say sixty percent of the kids were still wearing their costumes and asked me if they could keep them. That made me think this was a success, and I still see parts of them all the time so that brings me also great joy.



### **Mar Parrilla, NS Parent & Choreographer for *BRAVE LIGHT***

Working on *Brave Light* was such a joyful experience! From the beginning, I could see that we were working with a group of very dedicated students who wanted to deliver a socially conscious message through the arts. They worked hard making dances together, teaching one another, and practicing our now-NS-famous step routine. I am so proud of each of them! This task was a labor of love and collaboration. I thank Samantha and Johnny for their open minds, creative spirits, and supportive disposition. I thank all who supported from NS, and at home practicing the routine with the kids! And most importantly, I thank the kids. You never gave up, and you made this play a dream come true.



### **Samantha Hale, NS Music Teacher & Music Direction for *BRAVE LIGHT***

Something that I love about Neighborhood School is I'll start somewhere and I'll have no idea where that's going, but it always goes so far beyond what I could've imagined when it first started. That happened last year when we were learning *Sir Duke*, and by the end of it we had this incredible recording I had no idea was going to happen.... This year in Level Four and Level Three we started doing drumming, and level four really took it to this next level: we were learning about drum lines, we were learning about the history of drum lines, and then we transitioned to this more activist space and we talked about drum lines and second lines in New Orleans, and then we moved into learning concrete music theory. We don't have a traditional music class, but we started learning rhythmic notation and they took that and after they learned all about rhythms (all the way down to sixteenth notes and triplets and how you notate them) and they learned how to count those rhythms and play them, they went and worked in pairs and created a full arrangement of a drum piece on the buckets. Which also, just to recognize the buckets and the full circle we've come through since our last play, the buckets are these things we've been sitting on for the past two years, and I was like, 'Oh "bucket drumming", yes please!'

## Spring Learning Is Blooming



### LEVEL ONE

Whether delving deeper into our learning of South African countries with a focus on the native animals or searching for signs of spring that have awakened our senses, our Level 1 friends remain curious! Our most recent trip to the Arboretum allowed us to go on a spring scavenger hunt, take a listening walk in which we used our senses to ground ourselves in nature, and embrace our new-found class tree. Learning about the ways climate change continues to impact the animal world, particularly for the penguins in Antarctica, has us yearning to know more about ways we can help pave the way for a more sustainable future.



### LEVEL TWO

On our weekly mornings up in Franklin Park, Level 2 has tracked the growth of the daffodils children planted this past fall! The bulbs, blooming near White Stadium and in the Wilderness Picnic Grove, are a source of pride and ongoing scientific interest. Throughout the spring we will observe, measure, discuss, and write about these and other plants as we study plant parts, seed movement, and the life cycle of a bean plant!



### LEVEL THREE

We're excited as Level 3 digs deeper into our final trimester themes. This coming week, we'll be visiting the planetarium to kick off our outer space research projects. In social studies, we've been beginning to learn about the fight to desegregate schools in the US. As we move forward, we'll learn about key figures through history, reflect on our personal experiences, and engage with present-day issues of integration and justice in education.



### LEVEL FOUR

In Level 4, our focus has been grounded in the ideas of repair and reparations. Our social studies unit has four sub-units: Ancient West African Kingdoms; Resistance to Colonization and Slavery; Resistance and Power-Building during Reconstruction and 'Jim Crow'; and Modern Day Abolition and Resistance. Building on a historical perspective about the construction of Institutional and Ideological White Supremacy, the unit will culminate with a final project exploration of what racial reparations could look like now.