



Carter, Doug, Gigi and Suzanne Day



Ben, Judy, Hannah and Jeffrey Lyons

## Transition in the Admissions Office:

### A Sad Goodbye, and a Warm Welcome Back

**Deciding where your child should start her or his academic career is an important—if not agonizing—decision. At WSMS we think the best person to help you figure that out is a fellow parent.**

From the very beginning, in 1963, our admissions directors have been current or former WSMS parents. For the first decade, founding parents Susanna Doyle and Sally Burke headed the administration and admissions efforts. They used current parents as the liaisons to prospective WSMS parents—and this clever and effective approach has been taken ever since.

Eventually the head of school slot was assumed by a professional credentialed educator (as required for accreditation), but with only one exception, the role of admissions director has always been—and continues to be—held by a parent of currently enrolled students or alumni.

This fall we say a fond goodbye to former WSMS parent Suzanne Day as Director of Admissions, and celebrate the return of former WSMS parent Judy Lyons into that role.

At the beginning Suzanne was not an obvious choice for the admissions slot. She came to WSMS in 2005 with her son, Carter. Michelle Zemor, then Director of Admissions (and parent of Alina '98), recognized a kindred soul and asked Suzanne to join the interviewing staff. Suzanne's career to that point had been in pharmaceutical oncology—a vastly different environment than that found in an early childhood school! Having children had provided Suzanne with a much-needed break from the intense environment of a cancer hospital, and she found she loved talking to parents about her children's experiences. When Michelle decided to leave in 2008, Suzanne was offered the job. The timing for going back to work was earlier than anticipated, since daughter Gigi was still at WSMS, but this was clearly a fortuitous opportunity too good to defer.

As someone with an ardent belief in the school's mission and a history of involvement, Suzanne found the transition to becoming an employee an easy one: "I am selling something I believe in. We have a great team; everyone pitches in and is collaborative and supportive." She found prospective parents to be "kind and gracious, and easy to deal with." The hardest parts were having to say no to families on the waitlist and not being able to meet every expectation for financial aid.

Suzanne oversaw the implementation of online applications and scheduling (though she initially worried about parents losing Becky Bonelli's friendly first contact when they called), as well as the installation of a new database customized for admissions, which was upgraded this past summer.

Suzanne also managed the research into—and implementation of—the new Two's Program (see page 6). As she says, "This was a topic for my whole time as Director. We included it in the strategic plan, did research, conducted focus groups and surveys, and identified the risks, logistics, pros and cons. We took our time before deciding to do this as a pilot program with siblings and legacy families."

Suzanne is sad to leave WSMS, but excited about her new life in Washington, CT. Her children are attending Washington Montessori School, so she will be bringing the perspective of an ongoing Montessori education to her new role as Secretary of the WSMS Board of Trustees. We are delighted that we will continue to see her on a regular basis.

And Suzanne says, "I am thrilled to have Judy Lyons succeed me. She is the epitome of an admissions director!"

Judy is back in familiar territory: she initially took on the admissions role in 1987. She succeeded Judy Leon (mother of three alumni, grandmother of an alumna and a current student), whose husband had been transferred to



Carter and Gigi



Gigi



Carter



Gigi and her grandparents

London. Like Suzanne, Judy Lyons had served as a parent interviewer, and was pondering what her next steps would be when her children were older. At the time Ben had just moved on to Collegiate (after four years at WSMS—in those days Collegiate did not have a kindergarten) and Hannah was just a year old; they are now 32 and 26, respectively.

Prior to having children, Judy had honed her people skills as a flight attendant for TWA, but she credits Ben's teachers with preparing her for the admissions job: "West Side Montessori educates you to be a better parent. I learned to choose words carefully, and be mindful of tone of voice and facial expression when speaking with children." This sensitivity transferred to her dealings with both prospective and current parents. Part of her goal as Director of Admissions became to "stress to prospective parents how much I had learned from teachers, administrators, and the mental health consultants, and how [the parents would] learn too."

Judy's husband, film critic Jeffrey Lyons, travelled frequently. After nine busy years doing admissions and juggling kids (and volunteer commitments) at schools on opposite sides of town (like Suzanne's, her kids were at Collegiate and Brearley), Judy opted in 1996 to hand over the well-oiled admissions function to Joan Silverman, who was the first (and only) non-WSMS parent in that role. But Judy's attachment to WSMS was strong, and she maintained her close connection with colleagues on the faculty and administration, as well as parents she had known through the years. When Mimi Basso needed someone to replace Suzanne this past spring, she reached out to the one person she knew could walk into the job.

Of course, things have changed quite a bit over the past 17 years, but the WSMS approach is deeply rooted. As Judy says, "Maria Montessori was considered innovative long ago, and her educational approach would have continued to evolve, just as WSMS has evolved over the years to reflect changes in the community, the environment, technology ..."

Judy says that one of her most important steps in the '90s was to delay the application start date until October 1 in order to remove the frenzy from the first days of the school year. WSMS continues to take a more relaxed approach than many other schools, allowing online applications until early January. As Judy explains, "We want to appeal to a diverse population, and keeping admissions open and flexible is the best way to do that."

She is amazed by how many new early childhood options there are now, and excited by the prospects of the Two's Program. And she finds it invigorating to be back at work with colleagues from the past, including Joan Shisler, Donna Lovell, Marcia Polanco, Neeta Arbeiter (a student teacher back then!), Margot and Melissa Mack, Sarah Gillman, Barbara Grant, Mimi Basso, and, of course, Becky Bonelli. One of the things she'll be doing is recruiting parents for those interview slots ... and likely training a *future* candidate for the director position.

# WSMS ADMISSIONS DIRECTORS OVER THE YEARS

**1963-1968.....Sally Burke**

*MOLLY '65, DANA '67, NAT '69*

**1968-1976.....Susan Heath**

*JULIAN '70, SEBASTIAN '72*

**1976-1986.....Barbara Angle**

*ELIOT '75, AMANDA '78, HILARY '78*

**1986-1987.....Judy Leon**

*CHRIS '82, MATT '84, KIRSTEN '86  
KIEP '13, MALOLAE 2WAM*

**1987-1996.....Judy Lyons**

*BEN '87, HANNAH '93*

**1996-1998.....Joan Silverman**

**1998-2008.....Michelle Zemor**

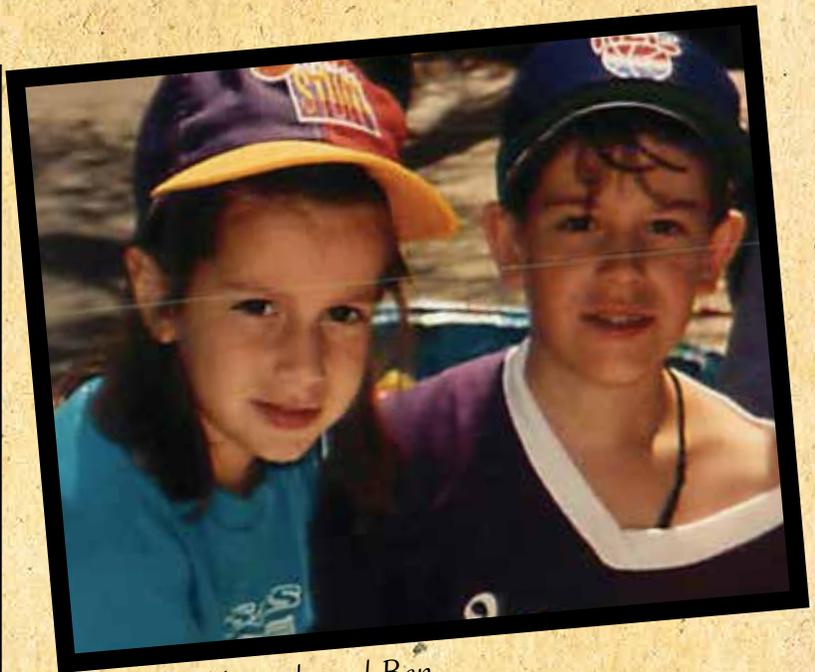
*ALINA '98*

**2008-2013.....Suzanne Day**

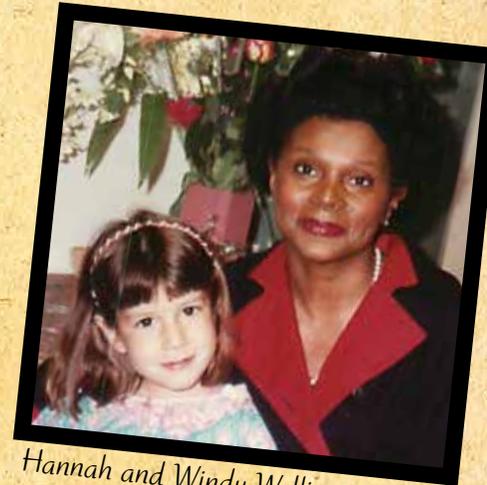
*CARTER '07, GIGI '09*

**2013.....Judy Lyons**

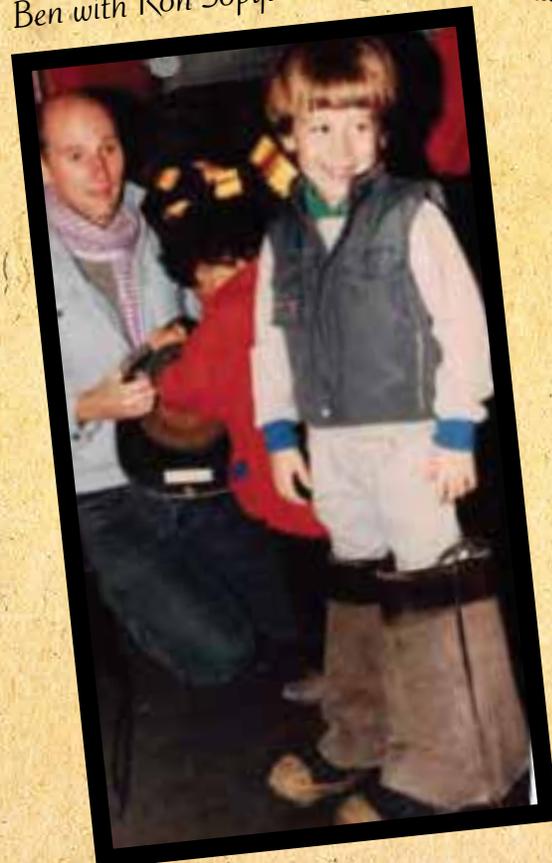
*BEN '87, HANNAH '93*



*Hannah and Ben*



*Hannah and Windy Wellington*



*Ben with Ron Sopyla*