

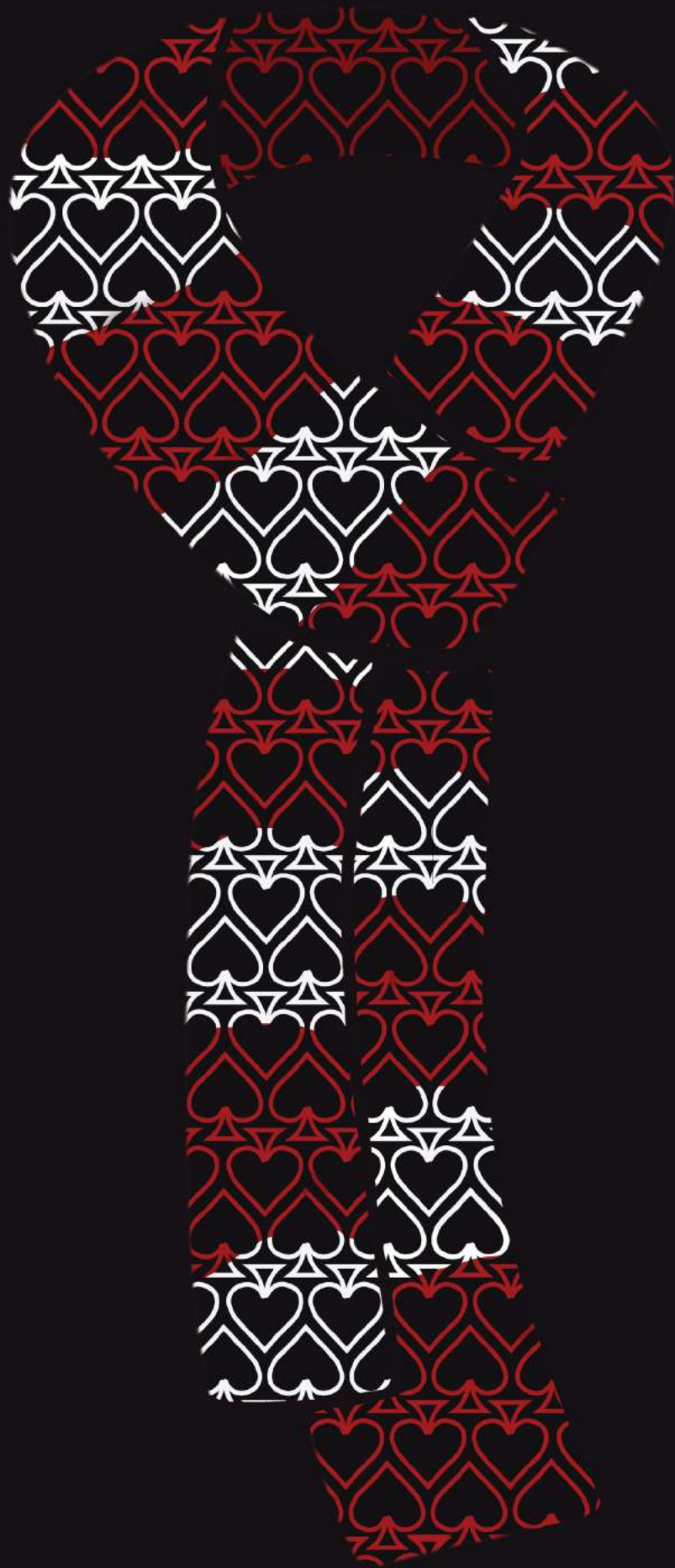
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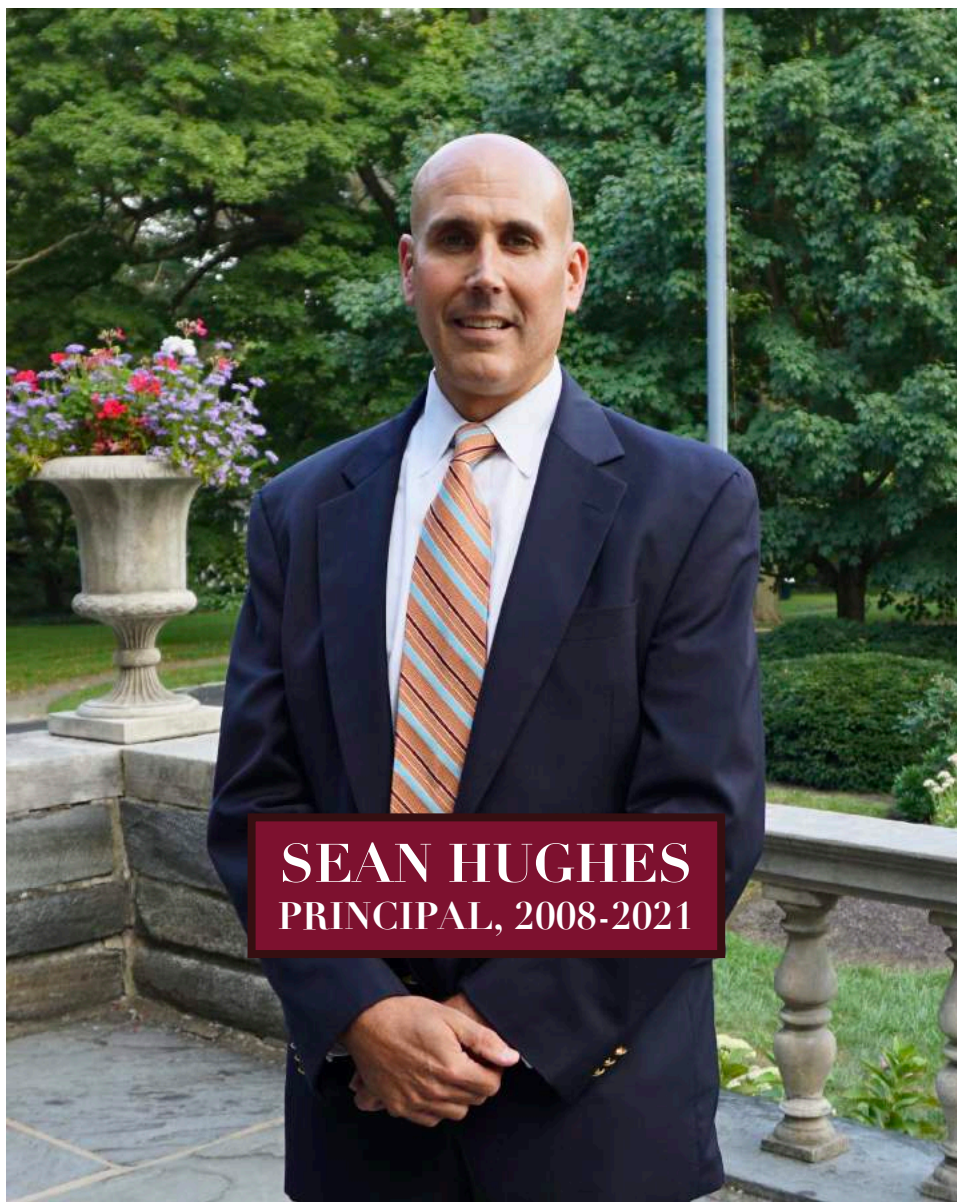


IN MEMORY OF SEAN HUGHES



CHARACTER COUNTS

FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS. FOREVER THE HEART OF ACES NATION.



THANK YOU MR. HUGHES



A COMMUNITY IN MOURNING

News Editors

Sean Hughes, LM's principal of fourteen years, was tragically killed in a car accident on the morning of Saturday, November 13. Hughes was driving his son Nolan to a soccer game when a collision occurred between his car and another at an intersection in Camden County, New Jersey. Hughes, his son, and the other driver were all taken to local hospitals, where Hughes passed away from his injuries. He is survived by his children Nolan, Jack, and Kate, and his wife Kristi.

All district schools and activities were closed on Monday, November 15, following Hughes's passing. Early in the afternoon, teachers held an event in the auditorium where they reflected on stories about their late principal in remembrance. Later, in front of Hughes's office window, students held a vigil in his honor, with many stepping up to an open microphone to speak of his impact on them. Hundreds of students, teachers, alumni,

and community members gathered to place flowers, candles, and other mementos in front of the window. They reflected on their time with Hughes and comforted each other. Various student organizations have since planned ways to honor their principal as the community continues to process the deeply felt loss.

A memorial service for Principal Hughes was held at LM at 1 p.m. on Saturday, November 20, with speeches from several of Hughes's former colleagues, alumni, and current students, alongside performances from the choir and orchestra. The collection of stories shared offered solemn comfort to those mourning Hughes's passing and offered deeper insight into a principal who always put his principles first. As the LM community moves on from this difficult loss, it carries with it the legacy and impacts of a man who made Lower Merion High School what it is today.



Photos by Anika Xi '23/Staff and courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

HIS LASTING LEGACY

Editors-in-Chief

Principal, Athletic Director, teacher, father, friend. Throughout Sean Hughes's time at LM—whether it was teaching history classes, helping out athletes and coaches, or serving in an administrative role—he was always one to surpass the expectations of the job. Mr. Hughes's presence was a hallmark of the LM experience: from greeting incoming freshmen to handing seniors their diplomas at graduation, Mr. Hughes was there for every student every step of the way. His sudden absence has been deeply felt by not only the teachers and administrators who knew him personally, but by the whole of the LM student and alumni body.

Mr. Hughes occupied the role of principal for fourteen years, ensuring day-to-day functions ran smoothly and that LM students were as successful as possible. However, as you'll read throughout this issue, Mr. Hughes was so much more than a principal. He was a mentor for many new teachers, instructing them on not only the complexities of teaching high schoolers, but of life itself. He was a morning workout buddy for other teachers, never missing an early day to catch up in the cardio room. He was a photo lover, always there to capture any funny event or spirit day outfit to keep as a memory. He could make light of any situation, even if it seemed impossible to do so. He was a rule-breaker and put the good of students before any regulations, always citing the motto, "It's better to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission." He empowered all students, truly being the heart and soul of Aces Nation.

While Mr. Hughes will leave many legacies behind for those who knew him, his greatest one will resonate throughout the halls of LM for years to come, encapsulated in a simple but moving motto: "Character Counts." Mr. Hughes did not blindly preach this phrase—he embodied it, day in and day out. He treated everyone with respect, no matter if one was a long-time colleague or a new student acquaintance. Even as Mr. Hughes's accomplishments at LM grew as he moved up the administrative ladder, he never sacrificed his character. The camaraderie and respect he displayed towards his fellow staff members did not dissipate as he changed positions, but grew instead. His warm generosity and good character extended to the student body as well, with him never failing to greet students in the hallway, stop for conversation, and emphasize his "open door policy" for them to voice their opinions and concerns.

As LM attempts to move forward from this devastating event, it is pivotal that we honor Mr. Hughes's legacy by continuing his timeless ideal of "Character Counts." While it is easy to get caught up in the demands of high school, from time-consuming classes to daily sports practices to club meetings, we cannot forget to uphold our character. Ultimately, our peers and teachers will not recall the hours we spent completing assignments or running from one meeting to the next, but how we treated each other when it mattered most. Mr. Hughes was always there to remind us of these lessons, so let us remember him by following through with them.

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

In this special issue of *The Merionite*, you will read stories and reflections on Mr. Hughes from many in his LM family that knew him best. Please note that the collection of writing may be an emotional read for some and we encourage you to reach out for support or help from your LM peers at any time if you feel the need to.

Due to the limitations of a printed pub-

lication, we may have abbreviated submitted writing to fit within this issue; we encourage you to check out our website at themerionite.org to find our full collection of unabridged writing for this issue.

We invite you to write to us with your own inquiries, thoughts, or reflections. *The Merionite* can be contacted via email at merionite@gmail.com or in Room 200A.

LMHS ADMINISTRATION

G. SCOTT KILPATRICK

I first took up the post of Assistant Principal fourteen years ago, as Mr. Hughes was transitioning from that role to Principal. Since that moment, I’ve gotten to know him as a close colleague and friend, from seeing his recurring appearances in the Manayunk bike races and Broad Street Runs, to testing the bureaucratic boundaries of our jobs together, to watching Jack, Kate, and Nolan grow up under his unremitting parental love. Hughes was the person that made LM what it is today—a man of love, of faith, of family, and a man embedded in countless memories.

As a principal, Hughes was the epitome of both perfect order and constant chaos. He was always consistent, from being the family man and never missing one of his kids’ soccer games even across state lines, to showing up at every major sports game when the Aces’ name was at stake, to being a regular presence in the weight room or along Montgomery Avenue every morning at 5:30 a.m. He was the archetype of organization, hoarding entire cabinets of files dating back to his days as Social Studies teacher and masterminding the planning behind the current Lunch and Learn schedules. At the same time, Sean was always the first to break the rules for the better when it came to the human side of his job—often side by side with “Captain Chaos,” as he liked to call me. After purchasing the hammocks now in the LM courtyard without permission, I remember being called down to his office, where Sean sat with Superintendent Copeland on the phone. “Scott, why do I have an order to deliver six hammocks to LM?” rang out the superintendent’s voice, to the glowing amusement emanating silently from Sean’s face. Hughes was the man to get it done, whether or not the rules governing his job agreed with him.

And then there was the side of Hughes that drove me nuts. If we want to return to the topic of organization—in the principal’s conference room, we compile an exhaustive list of planning objectives for the following school year a full year in advance. No matter how “exhaustive” that list was, though, I’d always be receiving calls in August—*August!*—from Sean with the classic last-minute detail he thought of. “Oh hey, Scott, what about this idea?” And don’t forget the week of the Amazing Ace, when he’d be so excited about the event that everything else on his schedule was as good as gone. For all those crazy moments, though, they’d be more than matched by the heartwarming and fun ones—Sean buying cheesesteaks for all the administrators after the Eagles won the SuperBowl,

Sean with a student at an ATM taking money out to recover their car that was towed from the LM lot only hours before, Sean giving out a dozen more parking slots to seniors than LM had capacity for. And Mr. Hughes always had your back. When I may have “misplaced” a sticker on a board member’s car during my third year here, to the irate “I want to know who put this on my car?!” district-wide complaint, it was Sean who offered the innocuous “I made the decision,” much to my relief.

One thing a lot of students perhaps do not appreciate about Hughes is the amount of work he put in to make sure that students had the best experience possible. He faced more than his fair share of hardships in the past, from receiving hate mail as a principal fresh on the job following the laptop scandal while overseeing construction of the new building, to balancing the conflicting interests of teachers, parents, and so many interest groups at LM, but he always found a way to make it work. His guiding objective behind it all was to do it for the students, no matter what. So much of what you now enjoy at LM, from the scheduling to the school furniture to graduation and proms, is because of him and his desire to be a principal first and foremost to you all. Unapologetic and unrelenting, light-hearted and loving, he made it his mission to help every student live life to the fullest at LM—and he will always be remembered for that.



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

JON FADELY

Sean Hughes loved history. So here is some history. Sean Hughes was the Assistant Athletic Director when I was an assistant coach. He became the Athletic Director while I coached soccer and basketball. Sean became an Assistant Principal and I became a full-time Health and Physical Education teacher and the head soccer coach. Sean then became the Principal of LM and I became the Assistant Athletic Director and then Assistant Principal.

Sean Hughes made history. He was 100 percent invested in the planning and building of the new Lower Merion High School. He was determined to carry history from the old building to the new building and put tremendous thought into the contents of the time capsule. He was determined to save pieces from the oldest gym floor in the district and bring them to the new school to display, along with artwork and lockers from the original locker room. Additionally, he carefully preserved the clock tower from the old building, the old courtyard, and the Downs Gym.

Once in the new LM building, he changed bell schedules to meet the needs of all students. He created Professional Learning Communities to support students and to allow teachers to have meaningful collaboration time. He implemented Lunch and Learn, an initiative that attracted schools from across the state to observe, take note of, and then implement in their own districts. He built a school culture and community where character truly counted! He continued to make and build school spirit with Radnor Spirit Week, Maroon Madness, The Amazing Ace, and the creation of the iconic Lip Dub.

Sean even tried to improve student parking, attempting to maximize what little space we had, and giving up his own parking spot to students every year. All decisions he made were for his students’ best interest. He truly believed and instilled in each of us that as LM employees, we were in the customer service business and the students always came first.

Sean Hughes had an incredible ability to find a person’s strength and empower them to become leaders. Many of those who worked under him in the past rose to assume the mantle of leadership themselves, with two of his Assistant Principals becoming superintendents and numerous others becoming principals and supervisors. Sean built an incredible Faculty Council from which he could hear teacher voices directly, including all the department chairs. Under his leadership, each of these departments have been enhanced with new classes, new electives, and additional support, along with groundbreaking initiatives like standards-based and quarterless grading. Each of these department chairs were encouraged to come into Sean Hughes’s office with ideas, and he immediately saw their passion and offered support for their propositions to be successful. Sean never led with a top-down mentality. He always was there to support his teachers and knew the most successful programs and ideas came from within and were organic. This was his leadership style with the HSA, the students, and the faculty and staff. Sean loved innovation and considered himself a lifelong learner as well. He wasn’t just a leader, but was a teacher for students and adults. He made everyone a better person.

KAREN DEFRANCO

I’ve had the pleasure of knowing Sean for two decades, although we began at different starting points, him as a Social Studies teacher while I started in Math, and our paths only truly converged a few years later when he rose to Assistant Principal and I became the Math department chair. Now thinking back, it’s no surprise Sean found his roots in history—after all, he was a natural history buff, who could recall hours and hours of the history underpinning our school district, from Hap Arnold to General Becton. The tale of time really was a novel to him, and with his knowledge he could’ve been the walking novel of LM. But, as it turns out, he would become so much more.

There’s two things that encapsulate who Sean truly was: relationships and service. Often, they went hand in hand. Relationships for Sean were key to forming a school culture and work environment that would not only enable students to thrive, but take pride in their learning. Family was his highest priority, and I like to think Sean saw LM as his second family, because he was always at LM and there for those who needed him. In my eighteen years as a teacher in New York before coming to LM, I never saw a principal spend as much time with students as Sean did. He would always be the first in the door and the last out, finding as many opportunities to inter-

one-liner that’d turn your sour mood into laughter instantly. No matter how busy your weekend or Monday morning was, he could make it bearable. His sense of humor was hands down the best.

Sean recognized that his ultimate responsibility as Principal was to the kids, and he made this his guiding philosophy throughout his time at LM, pushing for change even when there was little room to give. The most famous example of his creativity as Principal was Lunch and Learn, an initiative he piloted seven years ago during my second year as an administrator, in which he spent the preceding summer trying to work out every kink he could think of. Even with all of the preparation, he knew it sounded bizarre: letting 1500 kids free for an hour, what am I thinking? He knew deep down that it was a wonderful idea, but he was still scared. There was no guidebook on doing something like this, as he was going into uncharted territory as a principal. But that was Sean. He would encourage you to try it no matter how unrealistic it sounded and then ask for clemency later. When the Keystone exams were coming into being for the first time, as Math department chair, I thought it would benefit both students and teachers to have each Algebra class co-taught by two teachers—except at five Algebra classes apiece, that would amount to effectively paying for ten teachers, or doubling the budget. An impossibility, in other words. Sean made it happen. I don’t know what financial wizardry he pulled off to make it happen, but his efforts gave me some of my most rewarding years as a teacher, and for that I am forever grateful.

There are so many ways that come to mind in which Sean helped create the school experience you all now enjoy, so many ways in which he challenged the status quo to make LM a better place—creating interdisciplinary teams among teachers to enable content collaboration and make teaching experiences similar across subjects; investing time, money, and effort into building the high school he envisioned, custom fit with collaboration spaces, fascinating architecture, and relics of the previous building; implementing shadow classes, where every department chair and administrator would “shadow” the coursework of two students from each grade throughout the school day (I ended up taking a test in French; let me tell you, not my strong suit). The list goes on and on. But at the end of the day, Sean just wanted what was best for his students. He wanted LM to be the best place possible for students to learn and be themselves, and he went out of his way to make it happen. And through it all, he was genuine and lived “Character Counts” every day. That is the legacy of the man I have the honor of knowing as my close friend and colleague, and it will live on in all of us.

TYRONE ROSS

Dear Sean,
Where do I begin? There are so many great moments and memories that I could go on for pages and pages, but I will do my best to keep this short and on track.

In our very first conversation, you gave me a piece of advice that I will never forget. You said that in order to be successful here, always do what’s best for students and use that as a guide to make decisions, not whatever rule might be in place. For over three years, I had a front row seat to watch you pour your heart and soul into every student every single day. You always wanted students to find success, knowing that success looks different for everybody.

Over the more than three years that I worked with you, you were more than just my boss. You were like family; you were and always will be my brother. I learned so much from you and not only became a better administrator but a better person. I will always remember how much you cared for the students and staff at LM and how you beamed with pride when talking about your own kids and wife’s accomplishments.

I always think of this quote when I

think of you in reference to what it was like working for you: “Train people so they are ready to go to the next level but treat them so good that they do not want to leave.” You were a great leader who could motivate change, promote your vision, and saw your role as an educator first and an administrator second. Your door was always open to anyone who needed to talk with you. You truly had a vested interest in every student, past or present, and all staff in the building. I remember walking out of your office after the first time you explained Lunch and Learn, thinking, “This guy must be nuts.” Who sets 1500 students free for an hour every day? Well, you did because it is best for students.

Although you are no longer with us, not a day goes by where I don’t think of a story or wish I could just walk in your office and talk like we used to. Sean, you will always play a big part in my educational career and life. I will use the lessons that I have learned from you to continue to grow as an administrator. I miss you Sean. I promise that I will do my best to honor and carry your legacy forward. Rest In Peace, my friend.

LMSD ADMINISTRATION

SUPERINTENDENT ADDRESS

DR. KHALID MUMIN

Mr. Hughes was the consummate champion of all children and an educational leader that all educators aspire to become by leading children to infinite possibilities of success.

As a champion of all children, Mr. Hughes leaves a legacy of motivating students to complete rigorous academic requirements, engage in student activities, express their individuality, build character, and have the confidence as graduates to compete and lead in this ever-changing society.

Because of Mr. Hughes's influence, the world is much better place, as he has groomed a cadre of activists, scholars, artists, athletes, and humanitarians who continually demonstrate the ability to lead and conquer any goal with hard work, resilience, perseverance, fearlessness, grit, confidence, valor, and swag.

The conversations I have had with students, parents, alumni, staff, colleagues, and community resonate deeply, as they have all shared special moments, conversa-

tions, and memories that continue to solidify Mr. Hughes as a legend in Aces Nation. From making the commitment to be visible amongst the students and community at events to making unscheduled phone calls with alumni to check in on their progress, Mr. Hughes had the innate ability to make everyone he encountered feel like they were the most important person in the world, because he was a great listener and a master of promoting open advocacy, passionate action, and success for all children.

Most importantly, Mr. Hughes was a beacon of hope and a leader who used character to focus on all aspects of a student's educational experience, while using mindfulness as the pillar and support system for success. Moreover, like Lao Tzu, Mr. Hughes saw character as "your destiny." Thus, the destiny of Aces Nation is limitless, onward, and upward because of Mr. Hughes's commitment to live and lead for the greater good.

NORTON SEAMAN

FORMER PRINCIPAL

Sean Hughes was an Assistant Principal when we first met. I was the Interim Principal in 2004 and 2005. Sean and Mrs. Sandy Flocco were very instrumental in getting me through the year.

My first glimpse into his personality, intellect, and work ethic took place in the cafeteria. A fight between two boys resulted in their food trays being thrown on me. Sean took command of the situation and settled it quickly. When we got back to the office, he could not stop laughing. The message I took from his laughter is that this man is "real."

When we were given assignments from Central Administration, he never hesitated to complete them. He was not a procrastinator.

He had a special genuine charm that the students loved and respected. Sean treated teachers, secretaries, custodians, instructional aides, campus aides, and bus drivers as his equal. They just had different responsibilities. Sean always worked out before school, but he was never late. We would briefly discuss events for the day. His knowledge and ideas were always on target so most days went by very smoothly.

However, when there were problems, he was always ready to step in and offer his expertise. As always, when groups of students were together, they greeted him with a "Huuughes."

Sean and I attended many school events, from concerts to football games. His knowledge of all the extracurricular activities and the participants helped to make him the beloved man that he was.

One of his skills was observing and evaluating teachers. His presence in the classroom was well received. Teachers and students knew that his primary reason to observe teachers was to help make them better.

During the school year, Central Administration went on a national search to find a permanent principal. Every week I spoke to the Superintendent and explained that the best person for the job was Sean. He knew the kids and the



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

staff and understood the clientele of LM.

Meanwhile, they sent us six candidates over a period of time. None of them were a good fit for LM. In my opinion, Sean was the very best choice. Finally, they agreed, and it was the best decision they ever made.

His impact on LM has been immeasurable. Thousands of students were fortunate to have Sean as their principal.

The tribute to Sean Hughes in the school auditorium was well done and demonstrated the essence of the man.

General George MacArthur stated, "Good leaders know all the rules. Great leaders know the exceptions." Sean Hughes was a great leader who knew those exceptions.

When the student body yelled out "Huuughes," that translated to, "We love you Mr. Hughes."



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

Sean Hughes (left) and Norton Seaman (center) at the 2008 groundbreaking ceremony for construction of the new Lower Merion High School.

HARRITON PRINCIPAL

SCOTT WEINSTEIN

As the Principal of Harriton, I never imagined writing a reflection for *The Merionite*; having to write it as a memorial for my close friend and colleague, Sean Hughes, is so unconscionable and still so surreal.

As principals in a two high school district, Mr. Hughes and I worked very closely together. The construct is set up to be competitive with two schools at the same level. While there is real competition in our athletic and academic competitions, with everything else we fiercely supported each other. I think our support came from the respect that we had for each other that evolved into a close friendship. We shared everything to make each other better and thus to make our schools and the student experience the best it could be. We had strengths in different areas, creating a synergistic impact and helping each other grow professionally and personally. We challenged each other in ways that would make most people uncomfortable, but Mr. Hughes had a way of turning tough times into laughter—he was the best I've ever known at that skill.

I was named Principal of Harriton in April of 2016; Mr. Hughes was already Principal of LM for eight years previous to that time. We already had a strong relationship and respect for each other, but it gradually became more profound. On March 12, 2020, we left school in the afternoon, not to return to our buildings for the rest of the school year. We didn't know at the time that we were about to experience the most significant disruption and eventual recreation of education our country has ever faced. Since that date, we spoke multiple times a day every day. I still remember putting in my AirPods daily and walking around the neighborhood, trying to reimagine school from fully virtual to hybrid education to finally a return to in-person learning with options, visualizing the various changes to our schedule while listening to the needs of our students. Mr. Hughes valued student and teacher voices, recognizing that the school experience was always about the people.

I share the experience about navigating the pandemic as a principal because it exemplified his leadership and accentuated what Mr. Hughes was all about. He cared deeply for his students, his staff, and LM. I have learned many things from Mr. Hughes over the years, but what I will share with you

FORMER AST. PRINCIPAL

SCOTT EVESLAGE

Sean Hughes—friend, father, husband, colleague, principal, mentor, guide, visionary, teacher, leader. He filled these roles with love and passion and did them all so well. He was so much to me and was so much to so many.

Sean Hughes is Mr. Lower Merion. In every role he served—teacher, Athletic Director, Assistant Principal, and then Principal—he worked tirelessly and passionately for the students, people, and culture of LM. He loved the history and tradition of LM but also built and established new traditions, all the while envisioning a better educational world for LM and beyond. Sean Hughes was Lower Merion. The two are inseparable and will continue to be forever linked. His influence on LM will be everlasting.

FORMER SUPERINTENDENT

ROBERT COPELAND

As I write this, I realize it has been a month to the day that we all learned of the tragic death of our colleague and friend, Sean Hughes. It's difficult to put into words how much this man of character meant to the Lower Merion community.

Mr. Hughes embodied the idea of the servant leader; someone who always put the needs of teachers and students first. And, in turn, he was able to not just "run" LM; he "transformed" LM.

Mr. Hughes was a strident believer in the District's strategic plan. He took seriously the progressive tenets within the plan and worked to ensure that the education we provided went far beyond academic success. Sean Hughes wanted the program for the District, particularly on student success, to be a real and substantive journey. One example of that was the Challenge Success Student Survey. I



Photo courtesy of Scott Weinstein

is that he had an exceptional discernment of knowing what is important versus what isn't. It was one of his greatest gifts. He valued laughter and people, and it is no coincidence that thousands now mourn his passing. His infectious personality and genuine care for others drew people in, was magnetic, and he spread happiness to those around him. Much has been shared about his quick wit and sarcasm, but nobody quite did it with a lighthearted enthusiasm quite like Mr. Hughes did. While sarcasm and positivity can be looked at paradoxically, somehow he pulled it off—it was his gift.

On a personal note, the last two years have been the hardest of my thirty-year career as an educator. We had to be the ears, the strength, and the support for so many in our school system. We became each other's support. I was grateful for Sean Hughes as a professional colleague during that time, but more importantly for his friendship. Our woes and challenges would quickly turn into laughter and support. I will forever be a better leader because he was in my life, and I will also be a better person because of Sean Hughes.

He did things his own way. I marveled at seeing him interact with students. Whether it was sitting in the cafeteria by their side, attending their events, asking them for feedback, or just engaging in casual conversations in the classroom or hallways, Mr. Hughes had that same effect on students. He had a great way of speaking with and relating to our students and deeply valued their perspectives. He never lost focus on our fundamental mission of working for kids. This focus had profound effects on the culture at LM.

I miss my friend. Sean Hughes brought joy and strength to my life. The memories of our time together and the influence he has had on me are indelible. For everything that Sean Hughes is and has done, I am thankful.

Mr. Hughes embodied the idea of the servant leader; someone who always put [others] first.

projects and the accomplishments of teachers who tried new things. I know that with so many thousands of lives he touched over the years, the lessons learned and the memory of Sean Hughes will never be diminished. And that makes me smile.

SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT

CHET LAUBACH

The Sunday night following Mr. Hughes’s passing, as I was sorting through everything in my mind, like we all were, I decided to sit down and email my students to provide them a little context for my relationship with Mr. Hughes. I’m going to share a quick excerpt from that email:

“Aside from being the principal and a terrific boss, Mr. Hughes was a very good friend of mine. He and I came to LM together 24 years ago (he even started out as a Social Studies teacher). Although he was a couple years older than me, we both grew up in Havertown and had some common friends from the neighborhood. If there is one thing I could quickly say about Mr. Hughes, it is that he is truly the way that he appeared to be in school: friendly, outgoing, unassuming, and compassionate. I know for a fact, that he truly cared about EVERY student at LM (past and present). He was one of the most genuine and real people I’ve ever met in my life.”

I was fortunate enough to have Sean as my first work friend when I started teaching at LM back in 1998. I am in a unique position because I knew Sean when we were professional peers, when he was the Athletic Director and I was a coach, when he was an Assistant Principal, and then, for the last fourteen years, as the Principal of LM.

On Monday, November 15, schools were closed and we had a voluntary faculty meeting led by our administrative team. They shared stories themselves and then allowed us to stand up and share some thoughts and stories about Sean. Hearing my colleagues and friends’ stories about Sean and what he meant to them was gut-wrenching, raw, and hilarious at the same time. Sean meant so much to so many people. I would love to recap each one of the stories, but time cuts me short. However, the common thread of these stories was that Sean cared deeply for each one of us and was always looking out for teachers and



High school teachers

New Harriton and Lower Merion High School teachers for the '98-'99 school year include, front, first row, from left, Yvette DeVoue, school nurse, Harriton; Raquel Bejar, Spanish, Harriton; Melissa Greenwald, Spanish, Harriton; Joseph Callahan, social studies, Harriton; second row, from left, Danielle Michelman, Earth and space science, Harriton; Jean-claude Cantassot, French, Lower Merion; Karen Richter, vocal music, Lower Merion; Hugh Rodman, math, Harriton; Peter Dawson, Project Now, Lower Merion; third row, from left, Chet Laubach, social studies, Lower Merion; Sean Hughes, Athletic Director, Lower Merion; and Peter Dawson, Project Now, Lower Merion.

Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

Sean Hughes (row 3, center right) in his inaugural year at LM (1998), alongside Chet Laubach (row 3, far left) and Peter Dawson (row 2, far right).

students first and foremost. I always thought that Sean treated me the way he did because he and I were longtime friends. But it turns out he treats everybody that way.

I heard a great story about Sean from one of his mentors and someone he really admired—retired Athletic Director Tom McGovern. I think this story really encapsulates Sean. Before Sean came to LM, he had taught at Saint John Neumann Catholic High School in South Philadelphia. Shortly after Sean arrived at LM, Tom interviewed him for the Assistant Athletic Director job and explained the long hours, cumbersome schedule, and thankless workload the job entailed. Sean accepted the job immediately, shook Tom’s hand, and walked out of the room. Tom stopped him and asked, “Sean,

don’t you want to know how much you’re getting paid?” And Sean responded incredulously, in only the way he can: “You mean I am gonna get paid money for this?!”

More than anyone I have ever known, Sean had an appreciation and respect for people with different backgrounds, interests, and passions. He cared deeply about all people. Moving forward, I think we can all honor Mr. Hughes’s legacy by being friendly, caring, empathetic, and accepting of people, even when it’s most difficult. “Character Counts” was not just a saying for Sean—he truly lived it. If we had more people with the character of Sean Hughes in this world, I think the world would be a better place. We lost a great educator, a great leader, a great mentor, and, most importantly, a great friend.

PETER DAWSON

Sean was an excellent teacher and a great boss. Sean and I started together here at LM at the same time. September of 1998. He and I were both Social Studies teachers. He had about six years of teaching experience, while I was brand new. Sean quickly became the Assistant Athletic Director. He later became the Athletic Director here at LM, and he was awesome as an AD. He loved the students and supported the athletes and the coaches. Sean continued to move up the administration chain, serving as an Assistant Principal alongside Marcy Hockfield, Wagner Marseilles, and Scott Eveslage. The Dream Team.

Sean wanted to become the LM Principal, and I told him not to do it, as Sean wanted to be liked and appreciated by the students and faculty, but as the leader, sometimes you had to be the bad guy. Turns out I was wrong on both counts. Sean was an excellent principal and supported both students and teachers in their efforts. He loved “pilot” programs, which soon became not just pilot programs, but the norm. If it worked, it worked.

I think Chet Laubach said it best at the memorial service: Sean was authentic. He was nice and genuine to everyone he met. Sean was the same way to a freshman as he was to a senior teacher like myself. He was always supportive. He loved his job and making a difference in students’ lives. I feel for my freshmen, as they did not get an opportunity to get to know a person like Huuuughes.

Personally, Sean was a good friend. I worked out with him in the mornings. He had a great sense of humor and he loved being the Principal at LM. His death on top of Mike Stettner’s passing has hit the staff quite hard.

I think and pray for his family every day. So very sad.

JOHN GRACE

Dear Shadows, now you know it all,
All the folly of a fight
With a common wrong or right.
The innocent and the beautiful
Have no enemy but time.
Arise, and bid me strike a match
And strike another till time catch.
Run till all the sages know,
We the great gazebo built.
Bid me strike a match and blow.

I write, but there are no words adequate.
But, I know words are all I have; how do I even try to arrange them to remind me of Sean Hughes?

Maybe I can concentrate on the Light—bouncing in every direction caused by a reflection.

There. That is a good way to reflect Sean Hughes: he is the Light of Lower Merion—and all that any one of us had to do was allow ourselves to move toward that Sean Hughes Light and we could see so much more clearly the fullness of life, the promise and the possibility of every day at LM with Mr. Hughes.

So many of us experienced that type of reflection. So many of us try so hard to see it now.

We think we will see Sean’s Light no longer; but I am wrong if I let myself think it.

I heard a great phrase: “You can’t walk ten steps anywhere at LM without recognizing another example of Sean’s devotion to the details of his LMHS vision—a school building for every student, every staff member, every teacher.” Maybe I said it; seems possible.

It is another truth about Sean Hughes—

he dedicated so much of his day and his life to the fact that our school existed for one single purpose—a Lower Merion that gave every student a good place, a safe place, a special place every minute of every day. It is a school for all seasons.

Maybe that is the way I can recall Sean—better than Thomas More, because he is more than a man for all seasons. Sean was a man for all children—for Kate, for Nolan, for Jack—for everyone who carries an LM diploma from the twenty-five years he lived, loved, and led LM, and surely for the ones whom that diploma eluded.

Ok, but something eludes me, too.

There has to be a word, a single one, free and clear, that can help anyone dear to Sean or distant in the future who wants to affirm his legacy.

Trust.

Sean Hughes knew how to trust, and because he knew it, and understood how elusive it is, and how we often work in a system that values it far less than other goals to achieve; because Sean understood and practiced trust...

...every one of us who knew him, every one of us illuminated by that shining Light he reflected, every one of us who got the piece of him we needed, from that man for all seasons...

...every one of us thrived, because he trusted us to see every day at LM as he saw it—a day to discover a talent, a day to discover a friend, a day to realize that Mr. Hughes the principal loved us all and trusted us to figure out how to be that better person, for whom character would always count.

Thank you Sean, thanks Mr. Hughes, for each of these things. Peace.

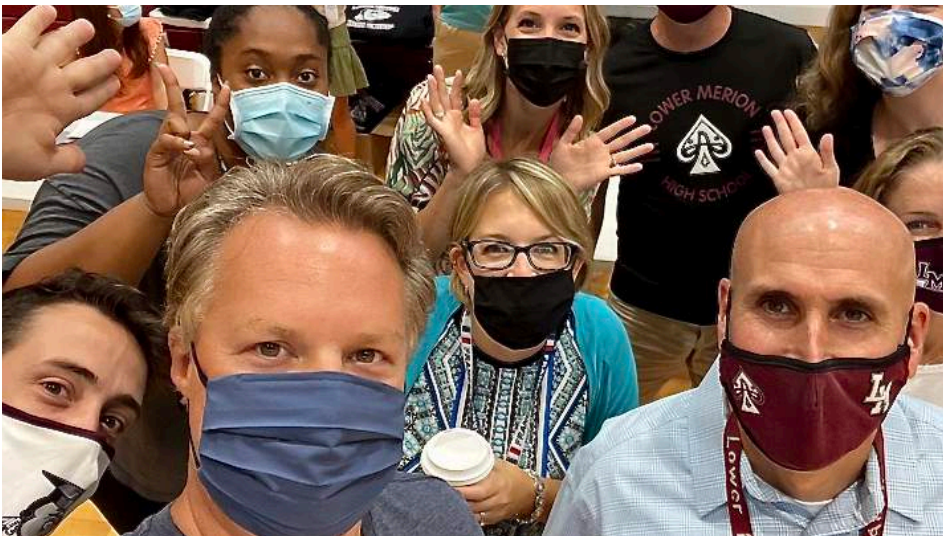


Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

Sean Hughes (right) poses with Chad Henneberry (center left) and various staff members during the 2021 LM teacher Scavenger Hunt.

CHAD HENNEBERRY


While it is known to all that Mr. Hughes’s motto was “Character Counts,” another phrase that Mr. Hughes often used was much more meaningful to me. Those words—“That’s awesome!”—have in my memory come to sum up everything that was so special about him.

Sean Hughes was the first person I met at LM and he shaped my career and life in a way no one else has. Hiring me as a new teacher in the Social Studies department, Mr. Hughes always was helpful with advice or checking in to see how I was doing. When I began to teach US History, Mr. Hughes brought me to a file cabinet in his office overflowing with great lesson plans, interesting readings, and authentic artifacts, like a newspaper from the day JFK was assassinated. “Take whatever you need!” he offered enthusiastically and genuinely. More importantly than the materials he shared, Mr. Hughes gave me confidence in myself as a teacher and the desire to continuously improve my instruction. When I tried out a new project with my students, the person I always wanted to share this with was Mr. Hughes. When he visited my class to check it out, he would always smile and say “That’s awesome!” That simple positive affirmation was so meaningful to me.

When I took on the role of advisor for


The Merionite, Mr. Hughes was always our most dedicated reader. Every time the editors published a new issue, I took care to put the first copy in his mailbox. I knew he was often too busy to read it from over from cover to cover, but he always praised the writers and artists and found something he liked in each issue. When the students would provide their take on controversial topics, or an opinion was published sure to ruffle some feathers, Mr. Hughes was solid in his support of student journalism, helping to weather the angry phone calls and indignant emails. He championed our paper both at our peak, such as when *The Merionite* represented LM at the White House (“That’s awesome!” he exclaimed) and also through tougher times, when he encouraged me not to give up. Mr. Hughes not only shared his wholehearted enthusiasm for our work, but, more importantly, he gave us his trust. He trusted that the students would be responsible and gave them the freedom to make the choices that would define their character. He trusted that the faculty and staff were making the best decisions for students and treated them as professionals. In this environment of trust and positive support, our school community thrived.

Mr. Hughes was a genuine man of character. He lived by his words. That’s awesome.



“LORD HUGHES”

“I remember one day [...] we all were assigned different important people in US history and then had a debate about a modern-day topic. This was the day he asked us to call him ‘Lord Hughes,’ which caught on and stuck for the rest of the year... by his design, I’m sure!” —Gretchen Lawson ’03



Photos courtesy of **The Enchiridion**

SEAN HUGHES: OUR COXSWAIN AND DEAR FRIEND



LM Crew showcases a new white shell named after Sean Hughes to him at Boathouse Row. Photo courtesy of Jim Keenan

JIM KEENAN

Whether savoring the azure expanse of the Chesapeake, throttle wide open and his beautiful family in tow, or supporting LM Crew along the banks of the murky Schuylkill, Sean drew unbridled joy from life on the water.

In 2019, Aces Crew bestowed deep honor upon our seasoned oarsman by naming a sleek, white shell after him. He beamed, standing proudly in front of the shell at Boathouse Row, flanked by eleven sturdy and admiring rowers. And an image comes to mind: if all of his LM admirers, past and present, were in this picture with him, we would extend to the edge of the parking lot and down the hill, spreading out widely along the water’s edge well beyond the frame of the picture.

Our oars lie still now. Tears make us bleary-eyed and blind. We have lost our beloved coxswain, Sean Hughes, the consummate maverick, and we cherish the time we had in the boat with him, rowing to the rhythm and to the cadence of his beat.

A boat is a sensitive thing, an eight-oared shell, and if it isn’t let go free, it doesn’t work for you.

Sean valued the vision of each teacher in his building. He empowered each of us to think, conceptualize, and implement—all to benefit the students we served. He would invariably stop by your room with that charismatic “Yo, what’s up?” He created space for you to freely fill in your thoughts. He shared his ideas with you, too. Then, upon exiting, he hit you with the one-liner that always left you laughing.

Herein lies the secret of successful crews: Their ‘swing,’ that fourth dimension of rowing, which can only be appreciated by an oarsman who has rowed in a swinging crew, where the run is uncanny and the work of propelling the shell a delight.

Sean knew and appreciated the talents of his students and staff, particularly when the art of teaching and learning was in session. Repeatedly, the entirety of LM found its groove during his tenure. Students were learning in classrooms and the pool, in arts spaces, in math and science competitions, against Central League rivals, behind the wheel, and in the world of work. If seeking him in his office at the height of an LM swing, forget about it: no one home. But you could find Sean roaming with a smile: conversing in the cafeteria, observing in a classroom, fist-bumping in the hallway, or spectating in the Bryant Gymnasium, the Natatorium, or the confines of Arnold Field. We hit our “swing” because he never micromanaged students or teachers. He trusted our learning community, and our learning community trusted him.

The ability to yield, to bend, to give way, to accommodate, [...] was sometimes a source of strength in [people] as well as in wood, so long as it was helmed by inner resolve and by principle.

Each of Sean’s admirers derived partly from his compassion for us all. He treated you like a comrade, and you always knew where he stood on matters involving family. He held his family dear to him, and he hoped you shared his sentiment. Secretly, he knew the best instruction or student production came when knowing one’s family was safe and secure. So he never interrogated. He simply wished you the best and a speedy return. When the pandemic made our lives complex, he countered with simplicity: meet with your classes and PLCs. Take care of yourself and your family. Nothing more, nothing less.

When you were done and walked away from the boat, you had to feel that you left a piece of yourself behind in it forever.

Sean’s selfless commitment to students and staff transformed LM, leaving such an indelible mark in our lives. And after some time ... perhaps after the cycle of seasons ... our oars will thrust anew with a blue sky overhead and the sun glimmering golden in the water leading up to our LM shell, and Sean’s incredible legacy will burn ever brightly in our minds, in our hearts, and in our souls.

*Italicized statements from George Yeoman Pocock as quoted in Daniel James Brown’s *The Boys In The Boat*.

RUSS LOUE

Sean was LM. He was the foundation of what makes this place special. He believed that the kids come first. That they should understand the “why” in their learning. That they should look out for and care for each other. His mantra of “Character Counts” is something that he lived by. All the high praise since his passing are not exaggerations. He was that person through and through. To so many students, he was that guy that made their day a little better. The students knew he cared and that he was genuine. But to me, he was simply my friend. Sean was like a brother to me. I don’t say that lightly. And that is why this hurts so much. For 24 of my 27 years here at LM, Sean has been the person I spent the most time with. He has been there for every major event in that time. Even now, after his death, a day has not gone by where I wanted to call or text or email something to him. An idea, a story, a complaint. That void is something that will remain forever.

Sean was always compulsively organized. His office was immaculate. He took pleasure in cleaning and organizing things. I used to move things on his desk and get a chuckle watching him move them back without saying anything. He would line the chairs up after every Faculty Council meeting in the conference room before leaving. I am the opposite, as many reading this know. I am unorganized, and I do not clean that well or that often. After one summer many years ago, I entered the old main gym to start girls’ preseason volleyball. I opened the volleyball closet to find it completely clean and organized. I knew right away who to call. The conversation went something like this:

“Did you clean the volleyball closet?”

Hughes was a huge influence in my teaching career. I was fortunate enough to start my high school teaching career at LM under the guidance of him as a principal and mentor. In fact, he was the person that hired me, and he always made me feel supported and welcome as a new teacher.

Over the years, I got to know Hughes in many different capacities. Mr. Hughes was my mentor and often gave me

“Yes, it was disgusting.”
“I can’t find my club jerseys.”
“I threw them out, they were disgusting too.”
“But they were my ...”
“You’re a slob.”

One year, I convinced Sean to teach a class with me. I told him that he had been out of the classroom too long and needed to reconnect with teaching. The class was Art and Modern Culture—best described as a deconstruction of teenage consumerism. He researched topics and came to class with a background like the History teacher he used to be. It drove him crazy when I would change the topic or take the class in a different direction than what he planned. Nonetheless, the addition of his organization and research made that class one of my favorites in my career. It is a memory that I will always cherish. It is because of that experience that I continue to advocate for team-taught classes.

I am not a religious person. Sean was. He was Catholic and leaned on his faith a lot. Did you know Sean wanted to become a priest? At the end of his senior year in high school, his mom drove him to St. Charles Seminary and dropped him off for a weekend orientation. He spent the weekend learning about the process on how to become a priest. When he got home Sunday night and hung out with some friends, he heard about their weekend of going to a U2 concert and having a great time. He decided he didn’t want to be a priest any more.

Sean never let go of the thing that led him to consider priesthood. The calling of service to others. I think as LM Principal he demonstrated that regularly.

As I write, I am missing my friend so very much. I know my life and the lives of many at LM will never be the same. And I wouldn’t want them to be.

NICHOLAS SEVERINI

valuable guidance on teaching. Beyond the classroom, he shared my love of sports and soccer and was invested in my success as a coach. He would always ask me about the soccer team and how it was doing. He was always the first to congratulate us on an important win and to give his kind words of support after a tough loss.

Hughes loved this high school, its students, and being

Everyone knows Sean’s motto “Character Counts.” It was the message with which he started off every freshman class and ended every senior graduation.

Staff knew his other recurring quote: “Ask for forgiveness, not permission.” This one was my favorite because it meant I could have carte blanche to teach how I wanted in my classroom ... so long as it was in the best interest of students. That approach made us feel empowered, made us feel respected, and made us feel trusted. Sean counted on our character and trusted that we would do what’s best—that we knew when to follow the rules, and more importantly, knew when to break them. I could choose to do something without asking for permission, and if that choice ended up being a mistake, I knew I could simply ask for forgiveness.

Sean had many quotes (“Maslow before you Bloom” and “Think again my friend” among the most recent), often taken from books on the latest educational trends, stuffed with enough Post-its and marginal notes to satisfy any English teacher. Now, I didn’t agree with all of these books or every one of Sean’s mottos. One that irked me a bit was how he wanted staff to be “yes, and” people instead of “yes, but” people. I understood what he wanted was people to move new ideas forward instead of finding flaws, but it sounded to me like he just didn’t want any critical feedback. My problem with this philosophy was that thinking critically is a cornerstone of academia, and without “but” people, I believe we limit critical thought.

While I stand by this point of disagreement, I now realize the reason Sean didn’t have time for “yes, but” people. He

here every day. I knew him from an athletic standpoint, because we often worked out in the gym in the mornings. It was during those hours that I learned so much about teaching and new educational trends, local sports, his love for his family and his children’s sports, and his personal love of teaching and history.

I wouldn’t be the teacher or person I am today without Hughes. He taught me so much,

wasn’t just asking others to be “yes, and” people; he was one himself. He wanted his staff to constantly be thinking about new ideas, and when they did approach him with one, he never said “yes, but.” Whenever I stopped by his office to ask him something, he not only gave affirmation, he always, always found a way to help. I’m going to miss that.

I’ve never known an LM without Sean Hughes. Sean Hughes, to me and to so many others, is synonymous with LM. A colleague who spoke at his tribute reminded me that Sean helped build this school, that decisions from design materials to color schemes to furniture choices were all ones that Sean was a part of. Lunch and Learn, or collaborative spaces—our whole school culture is reflective of Sean.

The thought of being at LM without Sean is overwhelming. In moments of grief, I sometimes don’t know how I’m going to keep doing it. But I realized that I’m not really here without him. None of us are. He’s ingrained in the mortar of our school. And for the hundreds of staff who knew him and the thousands of students who were here under his leadership, he’s ingrained in us.

Sean rarely asked me for my opinion, most likely because he was afraid I’d actually give it. *The Merionite* did ask, though, so here it is: Sean Hughes was the best principal I’ve ever worked for. I’m grateful he took a chance on me eleven years ago and believed in me, even if I didn’t always believe in myself. I’m grateful he made me feel like I was working with him instead of for him. I’m grateful he made this place one I love coming to every day. Mostly, though, I’m just grateful for him.

not just about teaching, but also about life. He cared very much, and he would always listen to my questions and would share his wisdom with me. Hughes made me a better teacher and person, and I know that he had this same influence on everyone in his life. He was a tremendous person and I will miss him dearly. I know his legacy will undoubtedly influence these halls and the people he interacted with for years to come.

MATH & SCIENCE DEPARTMENTS

BRIAN FEENEY

Mr. Hughes and I started at LM within a year of each other (1998, 1999) and it didn't take long for me to see he was someone I wanted to be around. Over the next couple decades, we were involved in fantasy football leagues, Philadelphia Phantoms hockey nights, and countless other school-related activities and events. I found someone who I came to consider my friend, colleague, mentor, and the person I could go to at any time and just have a good laugh. His great sense of humor was probably the biggest thing that stuck out to me right away. We could make each other laugh with a keen observation or a quick-witted comment. At times, it seemed as if we were competing to see who could make the other laugh harder. Mr. Hughes and I worked out most mornings for the past several years and the running joke was that I was the perpetual "before" picture and he was the "after." And who doesn't love a guy—my boss, mind you—who would make a visit to my classroom, ask the kids how they were doing, and then apologize to them that they got stuck with me as their teacher?!! And he did this a lot!! Classic Hughes humor! He was my comic relief and support on long days that bled into nights when we would stick around for school dances and proms or referee together in an LM staff vs. Harlem Globetrotters fundraiser. He was a strong presence on the sidelines of soccer and lacrosse games, always there to support the athletes and us coaches, regardless of the outcome.

As Mr. Hughes moved up the "admin ladder" here at LM, I became a little concerned that our relationship might change when he ultimately became Principal. What I overlooked was one of his many special qualities—the ability to subtly convince even the most hardened "old school" teachers to try new ideas or adjust to the ever-changing philosophies about teaching and engaging with students that were implemented here at LM. A movie quote from an all-time classic comedy comes to mind: "He could sell a ketchup popsicle to a person in white gloves." He convinced me to Maslow before I Bloom, Guskey-ize my teaching, and implement the domains of someone named Danielson. I swear he used some Jedi mind trick because I'm absolutely amazed that I even remember some of those names!

I think I admired Mr. Hughes so much because he was the kind of educator that we aspire to be. He just had this way of making everyone feel welcome, comfortable, and eager to do our best. We would have countless conversations about family and how important they are to us. He gushed about what his kids were doing with sports and school. It is very clear to anyone who has been around him that LM and the Lower Merion community were his second family and that he put his heart and soul into taking care of us. He was always around school, doing something to tweak or improve it so students had every opportunity to not only succeed, but truly enjoy their experience during their time here. I take solace in knowing what a tremendously positive impact he has had on so many people's lives. I am so thankful and appreciative of the 23 years we spent together here at LM.

SUSAN O'BANNON

I am honored to have been asked to write a short tribute about Sean Hughes. It's really difficult to convey to a young person what it's like to have known someone for 24 years. You may have family and friends you've known for your whole life, so you probably understand to a degree. But it is different when you get to a certain age; time passes differently. Years zip by—memories blur together. Rather than tell you about specific events or stories about Sean Hughes, I'd rather write about how I've seen LM change under his leadership over the last decade or two. We had at least five different principals from when I began to when Sean took over fourteen years ago. LM had a very different culture and feel to it back then, in the mid 90's. There were times that hazing and bullying got so bad that parents would keep their

THE HOUSE THAT HUGHES BUILT

JOHN VACCARO



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

Clockwise from top left: 2008 groundbreaking ceremony, 2009 construction of LM, 2009 topping off of new building, 2010 opening and freshman tour.

In the years leading up to the opening of the "new" Lower Merion High School, I distinctly remember the energy and passion with which Mr. Hughes approached the project. His thoughtfulness and attention to every detail left me wondering whether he was planning and designing a custom house for his family or a school for 1600 students. Mr. Hughes could not contain his excitement as he arranged tours for staff members of the half-built LM building. He beamed with pride while pointing out the details of what was to become of the metal studs and wires hanging in the hallways. It was evident that Mr. Hughes wanted Lower Merion High School to be a special place. In 2010, the new school finally opened, and Mr. Hughes proudly showed off its unique features, both academic and performance-related, such as the Art Wing, the Greenhouse, the Black Box, and what would later be known as the Kobe Bryant Gymnasium. When it came down to it, Mr. Hughes at minimum just wanted there to be something for everyone in the new school building. But it was his personal touch that made this place truly special. Mr. Hughes wanted LM to be a comfortable place for students, a school with a real community feel—and he worked hard to ensure that would happen. Take a look around as you walk through the school. Notice all of the spaces where students can meet up to work on a project or just hang out together: inside, there are high-top desks outside of the Counseling Department suite, counters in the corners of each floor, benches outside the library, and chairs in the atrium; outside, it's benches, picnic tables, and Adirondack chairs

in the courtyard. Mr. Hughes included student artwork spanning the decades on the walls, placed encouraging words for everyone to see, and imprinted the giant words "Aces Nation" in the atrium along with an enormous bulldog. Mr. Hughes recognized that schools are built first and foremost for students, and he never stopped thinking of ways to drive home this idea in our building. Lastly—and this should come as no surprise to those who knew Mr. Hughes as a His-

tory teacher in the '90s—one of Mr. Hughes's real passions regarded learning everything there is to know about LM, both past and present. Given his connection to the past, it was very appropriate when the giant ball made of lockers from the old school was hung above the stairs in the atrium, and the old gym floor made its way onto the wall in the lower atrium. Mr. Hughes built the school for our LM family. The next time you walk through the school, what will you notice?

THOMAS SWOPE

Mr. Hughes had so many admirable characteristics that I've found it difficult to write short and organized thoughts to express my appreciation for him as a person, principal, and leader. Since his passing, I've been amazed by the number of stories that I've heard from so many teachers, alumni, and students in which each had their own small interactions where Sean went out of his way to help or encourage them. I do think that one trait that has always stood out to me was the genuine joy that he took in seeing others' achievements and his willingness to do just about anything to help you succeed. There are two personal interactions that I had with Sean



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

just before his passing that I believe illustrate this strength. As a part of our Computer Science Club, we had planned an event this year that was designed to encourage students from underrepresented groups to consider taking a computer science course. There is currently a moratorium on field trips, but Mr. Hughes found a way to make it happen. He was never one to let rules get in the way of innovations that would help students succeed and was willing to risk pushback from administration to facilitate these ideas. The other memory with Hughes I recall was on the Friday just before his accident. We held a cross-curricular collaboration between my Artificial Intelligence class and Mr. Hawkins's Linear Algebra class over in the District Administration Office building. Sean's father was in the hospital at the time, but he still stopped in for about twenty minutes to support what we were doing. Just before he left, he patted me on the shoulder and said, "Great job Tom, thank you." It was obviously a small gesture, but showed that even though he was personally going through something as difficult as the passing of his own dad, he was thinking about others. I heard someone say once that a boss makes you feel like they're important, but a leader makes you feel like you're important. Sean will be missed and remembered as someone that always made others feel significant and valued.

DIANE SWEENEY

In my adult life, I have received a little-recognized gift among my friends and family. As I have grown weary with stories of office politics and quests for money and power, of laying bare one's ego in a relentless climate, I have been blessed with having a principal with a profound sense of humility and who was a proud public servant, whose purpose was simply to recognize and nurture and celebrate humanity. Every day when I came to LM, I was reminded that our job was all about the kids, and about each kid. We were exhorted to think creatively, to teach better, to reach deeper. Mr. Hughes created an atmosphere that affected the faculty and staff and resonated throughout the student body: he taught us to be kind, have empathy, and care about our work, to believe in the goodness and the promise of each person. LM is a better and different school than when I started, and we are all better and different teachers. It is most unfortunate that Mr. Hughes also taught us that we may not have the opportunity of more time; we may only count on the present. I am sure that he would tell us to make this day, this moment, count. Care about the quality of your work. Be kind. Cherish the person in front of you. Love.

kids home on certain calendar days that these actions had been done in the past. Homophobia and intolerance contributed to the negative atmosphere. In fact, one of the past principals was part of the problem, dividing the staff and stomping down morale. It was not a fun time to be part of the LM community. I had been teaching at LM for about eight years when Sean joined the faculty. There were many new hires each year back in those days, with a host of young faces replacing retirees. I always tried to introduce myself and get to know the new people, and I honestly couldn't tell you that I remember exactly when we met. Over months and years, I got to know him due to his outgoing nature and his willingness to attend the staff holiday parties and social gatherings. He always had a smile, a joke, and was always glad to see you. His good nature was infectious, and people were naturally drawn to him. At the time Sean was selected to become

Principal, he was faced with many challenges: the laptop scandal fallout, the economic bust of 2008, and the construction and transition into a new building. He navigated all of these challenges while at the same time building a positive culture within the staff and student body. People talk about how he spent so much time and energy with the students, and that was indeed one of his best qualities, but they forget all of the other things that a principal does that impact the school and community. From hiring decisions to daily interactions with staff, parents, the school board, and Central Administration, Sean did everything with the benefit of the school in mind. His first priority was to do what was best for the staff and students, always with a positive mindset. From his "Happy Monday" greeting, to walking through the halls the last day before break, and every one of the thousands of small decisions in between, Sean was good, and kind, and working toward a better LM

culture. Somewhere between 2007 and 2021, it worked. One day, I started noticing that students would say "Thank you" when they left class, even if it was just a study hall. There was a general feeling in the hallways that was different, more welcoming, more friendly. Students were now more open about their gender identities and sexual orientation. Bullying and hazing "traditions" had been all but forgotten and were rarely observed. When you know or work with someone for such a long time, they sort of become part of you. They influence who you are as a professional, as a teacher. All the stories and memories melt together into a general feeling that you get when you think of them. Seeing and talking to Sean always made me feel happy, protected, supported, and light. Now there is also the anger and sadness associated with loss, but someday, far into the future, the other feelings of happiness and light will come when I hear his name.

A LEGACY SPANNING A LIFETIME

A former teacher fascinated by history, Sean Hughes's own history is deeply intertwined with LM's. Serving an already impressive 23 years in the district, Hughes's career at LM was not limited to one department. Hughes began in 1998 as a Social Studies teacher and soon thereafter Assistant Athletic Director, not hesitating to take on more responsibilities even as a newcomer. Soon enough, Hughes took up the role of Ath-

letic Director, then an Assistant Principal and Principal. During his time at LM, Hughes implemented the acclaimed Lunch and Learn program, oversaw construction of the current building, and more—all while continuing his duties as Principal. *The Merionite* has developed a brief timeline of Hughes's career at LM to document the many stages of his career and his accomplishments that have permanently shaped LM's culture.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

1998 – 2002

Arriving from Saint John Neumann and Maria Goretti Catholic High School in Philadelphia, Sean Hughes first kickstarted his LM career as both a History teacher and Assistant Athletic Director. Already looking to take up more of an active role at LM, Hughes opted to pursue a role as Assistant Athletic Director in his first year

as teacher. Hughes seamlessly balanced the competing demands of a teacher and Assistant Athletic Director for the next four years, until he assumed the position of full-time Athletic Director. During that time, he focused on fostering close relationships with his students that would persist and grow through the years.

FROM THE GROUND UP

2008 – 2010

When plans began for the move to the current building, Hughes did not shy away from helping out with the process. He was integral in laying out parts of the building, advocating for student collaboration spaces as places for students to spend frees and get work done. But Hughes's contribution to the building was not restricted to the

administrative end—he tried to get in with the action as much as possible. According to Executive Secretary to the Principal Sandy Flocco, Hughes played an active role in the actual construction of the building: "He had workboots [and] a little helmet, so he could have access whenever he wanted to."

PREVAILING THROUGH CRISIS

2020 – 2021

Despite school closing due to the pandemic, Sean never stopped working hard to keep the lives of LM students as normal as possible. He focused on "essentializing" learning, developing curriculum alongside teachers that could help students learn best while virtual. He also introduced and advocated for smart technol-

ogy use to engage kids at home. As a principal, he also did not shy away from other major issues, actively engaging in conversations about race as a listener first while supporting students in their own advocacy. Following a transition from virtual to hybrid schedules, he was able to reopen LM in 2021 to resume in-person learning.

July 1998

Sean joins LM as a Social Studies teacher

2002

July 2008

Sean becomes Principal of Lower Merion High School

2005

September 2010

Under Sean's leadership, the new Lower Merion High School opens its doors for the first time

2014

2021-2022 school year

Sean adapts learning to a virtual and hybrid format during the pandemic

2021

1998

July 2002

Sean becomes LM's new Athletic Director

2008

July 2005

Sean becomes an Assistant Principal under Principal Dave Piperato

2010

September 2014

Sean and the LM administration implement Lunch and Learn for the first time

2020

RISING THROUGH THE RANKS

2002 – 2005

After four years as a teacher and Assistant Athletic Director, Hughes took up the role as the Director of Activities and Athletics. Hughes was an avid supporter of extracurricular activities, believing that it was a way for students to find interests beyond the classroom. As Athletic Director, Hughes oversaw all teams and clubs, ensuring that operations ran smoothly and that every game, musical, and club competition was a success. He also took the opportunity to have a deeper connection

with students, going to cheer for them at games and pioneering LM spirit with the first Maroon Madness in 2004. Through these efforts, he redefined the culture of athletics and competition at LM indelibly. After serving as Athletic Director for three years, he was then promoted to Assistant Principal, where he continued to foster close and affectionate relationships with his students. In time, he would come to be universally recognized not as Mr. Hughes, but "HUUUGHES."

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

2014 – 2015

Hughes was the mastermind who pioneered the Lunch and Learn schedule that has come to be one of the defining aspects of LM. Before L&L, students were assigned to one of three lunches based on which class they had in the middle of the day. After meeting with the Principal Advisory Committee and listening to students' feedback, Hughes realized that the existing lunch schedule gave students excessive time for lunch, time they could otherwise devote towards finishing work or meeting with

teachers. After working tirelessly for months to plan it out, he implemented his idea in 2014. Hence, LM's current lunch schedule was created, where students could meet with teachers, complete work, host club meetings, and eat lunch in one of the two thirty-minute halves of the lunch period. Since its introduction in 2010, L&L has become a hallmark of LM student life, serving as a much-needed work or rest period in the middle of the day, while attracting more school districts from afar to adopt the model.

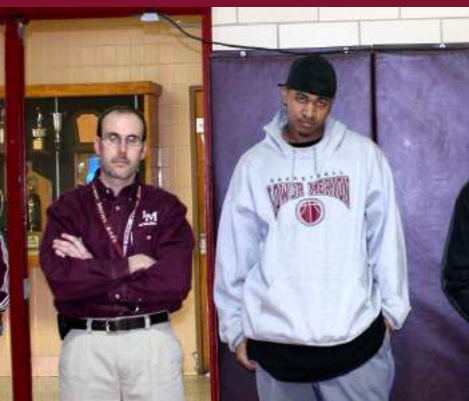
HUGHES THROUGH THE AGES
with reflections from students



COLLEAGUE



FRIEND



He taught me the effect that you can have on people when you wholeheartedly embody the phrase "Character Counts."
—ELLA BRESLIN '23

MENTOR



SHOWMAN



FUN-LOVER



LEADER

I remember bumping into him in the hallways during the start of freshman or sophomore year. He told me about a time when he also felt unmotivated and pointed out that the day was almost over. Though times here are rough now, thinking back to those memories helps me.
—JAIDEN SHIPPEN '22



Thank you for making our school feel like a safe and welcoming environment.
—BELLA FARINA '24

I was in his office discussing a serious topic with one of my friends, and near the end of the discussion we started to debate Star Wars, and I stayed there talking about Star Wars with Mr. Hughes for so long. He showed me his original Star Wars poster from 1977 and so much of the memorabilia that he had. I felt that since I am a big fan and he was as well, we connected on a level that many students didn't get the opportunity to, and I felt as if I had become his friend afterwards.
—JOSHUA SULTANIK '22



STUDENT GOVERNMENT

LEO SOLGA

STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT

To begin, I’d like to share a quick story with you all. Near the end of August, I gave my first Student Council speech. It was a speech for all of the new teachers in the district. There were about seventy of them, and I was pretty nervous. As I was waiting to go up, Mr. Hughes found me. He told me he wore a bowtie because he knew I was going to wear a bowtie, so that we could match. After the speech, he gave me a first bump and told me it went well. That was the sort of thing Mr. Hughes did. He would take the time to know students as individuals, support them, and look snazzy with them. He helped me believe in myself. That was Mr. Hughes—he loved his job and he loved LM; he loved his students and worked tirelessly with them and for them. And of course, we loved and respected him.

Every month, the Student Council officers would meet with Mr. Hughes and we’d chat about what was going on in the LM community. He always knew about everything that was going on. He would mention individual students by name, proudly recounting athletic, academic, and artistic achievements. The fact that he knew so many names and faces showed how much he cared about us. He was genuinely interested in what was happening in our lives. For our virtual Maroon Madness last year, I went to interview him, and before I left, he told me that as COVID-19 waned, he wanted to get back to engaging in student activities. He said to me, “Leo, make sure

the Players kids know that I’d love to be in one of their shows again.”

Along with the connection he made with the students, Mr. Hughes was beloved because he was a great man. He was compassionate, generous, and kind. He had an open door policy and made it clear that he would be there for us if we ever had an issue or a concern. He was empathetic and he listened; at Student Council and Principal’s Advisory meetings, he asked what our problems were. He always advocated for his students. We trusted him and he trusted us. It’s not normal for a principal to give 1600 teenagers free range of their school for an hour a day, but he did, and that’s now Lunch and Learn, one of the defining aspects of this school district.

Just as he was there at the beginning to welcome us at Freshman Orientation, Mr. Hughes was there at the end of the high school journey as well. We were looking forward to receiving our diplomas from him with a special handshake or hug. He made every graduating senior feel special. Although he won’t be there in person this spring, we know he’ll cross the stage with us in spirit.

He will be remembered by the school in formal ways, but he will also stay in our hearts and minds. While we mourn, we will also celebrate and lift up his memory. By living with his motto “Character Counts,” Mr. Hughes changed the culture of LM for the better. With every smile, laugh, and kind word exchanged between students, his legacy carries on.

ALANA JAMES

STUDENT COUNCIL VICE PRESIDENT

One day before our Advisory period, I made the executive decision to not only skip my Advisory, but also sit in the atrium to finish studying for a test ... just to preface, I am not a student that skips classes, I was just really stressed! Mr. Hughes came up to me as I was sitting in the empty atrium and he told me to follow him. I thought he would give me a detention, but instead we went to his conference room, where he told me that no matter what, the door to his office and conference room were always open. I was stunned. From then on, I spent most of my free periods in that room talking to him and Mrs. Flocco about school and life in general. Even when I thought no one else was willing to hear me, he always was. I found immense comfort knowing that, in a school of over a thousand people, there would always be at least one person rooting for me. On Friday, the last thing he told me was to believe in myself, to let him know if there were any updates about my college admissions process, and that he was available if I needed any help with my college applications. Though I won’t be able to tell him, I hope that even in his passing he knows that he was one of my biggest cheerleaders and someone

I’ll never forget. Sometimes you meet someone in your life that shows you what GENUINE kindness and leadership is, and, in my interactions with Mr. Hughes, he always did just that.

At graduation, when Mr. Hughes would talk about character, he always read this quote from Lao Tzu: “Watch your thoughts, they become your words; watch your words, they become your actions; watch your actions, they become your habits; watch your habits, they become your character; watch your character, it becomes your destiny.” I hope Mr. Hughes left knowing the impact that he had on us, aware that he exuded every trait that we all hope to one day emulate, especially involving our character.

Mr. Hughes, we can’t thank you enough for all you have done, not only for our school, but how you’ve touched every student. Thank you for always reassuring us that we were amazing students and young adults. Thank you for being a friend and an ally in addition to being our principal. As we progress throughout the school year and the rest of our lives, we hope you understand the extent of the impact you had on us. We will never forget the ideals that you tried so hard to instill within us.

CHARISSA HOWARD

STUDENT COUNCIL SECRETARY

When we had our very first Student Council Cabinet meeting in his office. Hughes kept repeating that we could use his conference room whenever, keep our backpacks in his office, and come hang out whenever we had

frees. It meant so much that any staff member, let alone the highest-ranked administrator at our school, was willing to be so sacrificial and welcoming. I think that spirit really encapsulated who Mr. Hughes was.

CAROLINE BURCHETTE, TISYA SHARMA, CAROLINE VO, YAYA WANG

SENIOR CLASS OFFICERS

More than being a role model of leadership, kindness, and character, Mr. Hughes was someone that we could joke around with or come to without hesitation. We can undoubtedly say that having Mr. Hughes as a principal was a unique relationship—one that you can’t find anywhere else. Anyone that has spoken with Mr. Hughes can agree that he was someone that listened with care. His ability to be detailed with every student’s needs made us feel valued at times when we felt insignificant. He was there to cheer for us at every sports game and there to support any show. When social justice issues arose like the Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate movements, he never shied away from difficult conversations; he addressed them head on and allowing our voices—student

voices—to shine through in town halls to tell our stories and to remind us that each day is a great day to get better. Mr. Hughes understood that we the students were the heart of the school, and he treated us as equals. For all that, we respected him, we admired him, and we loved him.

As we go forth, we will carry “Character Counts” throughout our lives. I hope he is proud to see that he has influenced countless numbers of people to become the best version of themselves. We leave you with the same thoughts that Mr. Hughes left for us. How will YOU be there for others? How will YOU plan to make a difference? And how are YOU going to make your character count? The best way that we can thank Mr. Hughes is by living as people of good character.

SEAN CAPKIN

STUDENT COUNCIL SPONSOR

Two years ago, during the pandemic graduation of 2020, when Mr. Hughes stood onstage for seven hours a day for more than a week to personally hand each graduating senior their diploma, students and their families had to wait outside the school for their turn to enter the building. As they waited outside, Mr. Hughes insisted that one and only one song play for hours on repeat all of those days: “This is Me,” a song written by an LM graduate from the movie *The Greatest Showman*. According to Mrs. Hughes, it was his favorite song. This makes me wonder ...

I wonder if he loved the song at first just because it was the work of an LM grad? Did the message of pride and esteem in one’s own identity move him in a way that maybe you could only understand if you were charged with inculcating and developing those very ideals in thousands of students each year, and here were those ideals made tangible from a former student going forth to serve, to preach them in a song to the world? I wonder if he saw something of himself in the title of the movie, *The Greatest Showman*. A principal by title, a dad-husband-son-brother-teacher-leader-listener-decider-innovator-motivator-supporter-defender-athlete-cheerleader-politician-custodian-Players cameo-er-Amazing Ace at heart. So many hats for one head, so many eyes squarely on him. We all knew being principal was a challenging position, but I wonder if any of us ever really understood the depth of the challenge of so many competing roles and how hard it is to be on all the time, to be the showman of the school.

I wonder about his drives to school in the quiet of the dark morning, just how early he got up to be the first one in the building, and even when I pulled into the parking lot at 6:03 and thought for sure I would beat him on this day, I still couldn’t manage it as the light from his office already illuminated the parking lot. He loved the camaraderie of the weight room, the spirit of morning runs along Montgomery, maybe one of the few things he did during the day that was actually for himself. But I wonder if he also loved the quiet of the empty school, the anticipation of the day; I wonder what small victories—an interaction with a student, the championing of a teacher’s brainstorm—motivated him to rise each day. I think of his drives back home late at night, after a board meeting or a choir concert or a homecoming dance attended by two-thirds of the school, only leaving after helping sweep the empty caf-

SPENCER ROSENBAUM, ELI GORDON

PRINCIPAL’S ADVISORY PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

The Principal’s Advisory Committee is a group of students that meets with the principal on the first Thursday of every month to provide feedback, assist with implementing new ideas and initiatives, and advise the Principal on all LM topics and issues. We speak for the entire committee when we say that meeting with Mr. Hughes was something we constantly looked forward to and truly cherished.

Every meeting, Mr. Hughes started the conversation off by asking, “How are you guys?” Even though he interacted with hundreds of students and faculty on any given day, Mr. Hughes would still be able to remember our names, clubs, accomplishments, and would always ask about and speak highly of our older siblings. In these meetings and throughout all of the time with Hughes, he always made us students feel important; it never felt like he had somewhere better to be or something else to do.

Mr. Hughes spoke with such passion, as he was invested in each and every student. He not only valued our opinions but attentively listened to us while exhibiting respect and empathy to all members. It is truly remarkable to find such a passionate and compassionate person who often challenged the status quo, no matter how challenging the task was to accomplish. After fourteen years of being a principal, Hughes still had that desire to continue to improve the school and help the community.

Even outside of our monthly meetings,

eteria floor himself as he sent others home to their families. I wonder how hard, or maybe in his case how easy, it was to live the character he encouraged in us each day, to be the one who stuck around to make sure the job was done.

I wonder how much impact one man can have. Mr. Hughes was my teacher before he was my friend, an adult kind and caring enough to seek me out by name as an impressionable teenager in the weight room, working to get to know me and making time to talk, making me feel appreciated. When I wrote about these very interactions in a previous graduation issue for *The Merionite*, Mr. Hughes came to my room to thank me for what I wrote, still making me feel appreciated even as an adult. I wonder if he knew how much that meant to me, his stopping down to say thank you for my dumb all-staff breakfast poems or my effort coaching football or his very last thank you for a rollicking Radnor Week. I wonder how many more times I should have thanked him for every time he trusted me, for hiring me with zero years-days-minutes of experience teaching in a high school classroom. I’m blessed to maintain friendships with many of our seniors after they graduate, and so many have emailed, texted, and called in the last month to share their stories of him, offer condolences, and seek solace. At around 350 graduating seniors a year for the last twenty-plus years, I wonder just how many more “me”s there are out there, grateful and impacted and a bit more of who they are today because of these little, personal moments in time he shared way back when.

I wonder about love, about how much love there is to give and to share, and how even when you think you might be at capacity there always seems space for more. I wonder how the right combination of care-respect-sacrifice-admiration-effort mixes to suddenly feel love. He had such space in his heart for our students, such empathy with personal matters as a boss, and we were only one part of his life—the love he had for his real family, coaching his kids’ teams, escaping on vacation with them, knew no bounds. I wonder about Mrs. Hughes and Jack, Nolan, and Katie, about how hard it was to share their husband and dad with so many of us, or maybe in their case how easy it was, because they knew how much he loved this place. I wonder if they know just how much he was loved here in these halls. I’m sure they know just how much he loved them.

Hughes was always there for us—smiling and waving at us in the halls, going to afterschool games and school-wide functions, and always having an open door policy. He allowed us to use his conference room and go to the Main Office whenever we needed. He understood that sometimes we just needed a break from the stress of high school. He always created an inclusive environment and welcomed all students to come in no matter the circumstances.

In early November, the president and vice president of our committee met with Mr. Hughes in his office to discuss other leadership positions within Principal’s Advisory. A fifteen-minute meeting discussing how to structure our board led to an hour-long conversation talking about our lives at LM, sports, creativity, former alumni and their accomplishments, and his son and his soccer team. This is a microcosm of what Hughes represented; his ability to connect, communicate, and inspire was one that is truly unique.

Every word he spoke contributed to the truth of Hughes’s personality. He genuinely cared about the students, school, and community. He was more than a principal; he was a great leader, ally, father, and friend. We are so thankful for his mannerisms and the way he listened to us, prioritized our thoughts and wants, and genuinely cared about everyone he interacted with. Mr. Hughes and the character he exhibited left a significant impact that we, as a board, school, and community, will never forget.

SPECIAL, GIFTED & PHYSICAL EDUCATION



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

THOMAS KLINE

PHYS ED

Mr. Hughes was the first person that I met at LM when I started coaching football in 2000. We became friends right away and that friendship never changed as he moved his way up the ladder from teacher to Athletic Director to Assistant Principal to Principal. We were always workout partners throughout our years at LM. We would arrive early before school and run all over town, sharing stories of our families, current events in the world, and things going on at LM. We ran the Broad Street Run together about ten different times. When we didn't run, we would lift weights in the weight room, or do P90x workouts in my classroom, or work out in the wrestling room with circuit training. As a principal, he was a tremendous leader. He never made you feel like you were working for him; you were working with him. He brought tremendous energy to this building and showed a deep caring personality towards the students and staff. He made time for you to visit him in his office and share new ideas for your classroom or the overall building.

Of all the things that I am going to miss

about him, I will miss his laugh the most. That laugh was used on so many occasions to share his excitement with new ideas as well as his enjoyment with the day-to-day running of the school. It was his way of letting his guard down and telling others not to take themselves so seriously all the time. Many times, he used that laugh to brighten the mood of a stressful situation at school. I know that many current LM students did not get a chance to know Mr. Hughes, and for those of you who didn't, I can tell you that you have missed out on a wonderful person who would have tried to really get to know you over the next few years and make you feel like an important part of this school community. He didn't care what your GPA was, if you were heading to college, the workforce, or the military; he would take an interest in you for the sole reason that you attended Lower Merion High School, and that's all that mattered to him, because you were one of his students. He was a very special person, who I will think about and miss every day. Rest in Peace Sean Hughes, you made me a better person just by being associated with you.

LISA ACHUFF

SPECIAL ED

While most of the students at LM knew him as Mr. Hughes or HUUUUGHES ... to me, for the last 21 years he was simply Sean. Sean—my friend, my mentor, and my principal. I am lucky to say that I have had the privilege of working alongside Sean for my entire 21-year career at LM. I first began teaching at LM in January of 2002 at the age of 22, and I remember feeling very overwhelmed in a high school setting because I always thought I was meant to teach in an elementary school setting. When the opportunity at LM presented itself, I went for it and have never looked back. Sean was one of the first welcoming and unfriendly staff members I met at LM. He was teaching History just a few rooms down the hall from me that first year, and we connected almost immediately about the fact that we had both grown up in nearby Havertown and had both gone through twelve years of Catholic school. Sean had gone through St. Dots while I was at neighboring St. Denis, and even though he was a few years older, his Catholic school experience was just the same. From there, Sean went to Cardinal O'Hara and I went to Archbishop Carroll. The schools are long-time rivals, much like Radnor and LM, so we would joke about being from rival schools. I watched him

Sean's greatest legacy will be the motto he taught to [...] years of LM students: "Character Counts"

move from teacher to Assistant Athletic Director to Athletic Director to Assistant Principal and then eventually he became Principal fourteen years ago. Sean loved LM! He poured his heart and soul into our school every single day. Sean's greatest legacy will be the motto that he taught to years and years of LM students: your "Character Counts" and that, over everything else, being a good person and taking care of one another is what is most important. Sean was a genuine family man and he cared about each and every staff member and our families. He was the exact kind of boss people pray for. His leadership was unmatched, and over these last few weeks, it has been so hard to come into our home without him. I just want to say: Thank You, Sean. Thank you for all you did for each and every one of us. You will be forever missed and loved. At the end of the day, Sean believed that what really mattered was making connections, taking care of each other, and being a person of strong character. That is what Sean instilled in all of us as educators and I will be forever grateful that I had the opportunity to work with and alongside him for as many years as I did. Sean, you will forever be our number one ACE! We love you and we miss you!

HEATHER VAN HORN

SPECIAL ED

Mr. Hughes worked to make Best Buddies an official club at LM over ten years ago. He understood that our students with special education needs were an integral part of our community and their inclusion and acceptance by our students in regular education was integral to building LM's character. The mindset he brought to helping the group get started and assisting with events throughout the years was a lasting contribution to many hundreds of students. One particular event Mr. Hughes attended was the Best Buddies Fashion Show

at Neiman Marcus. We asked him to speak at the event as our Guest of Honor. His big smile radiated positivity as he entered the room in his signature suit and bowtie, looking dapper as always. Mr. Hughes's presence and kindness made that event special for the students in attendance who heard and felt his support, enthusiasm, and acceptance. Whether in the hallway or at a big event, he always took time to tell the students how valued they are and how special Best Buddies was. His legacy within the club is priceless.

A CREED THAT MADE CHARACTER COUNT

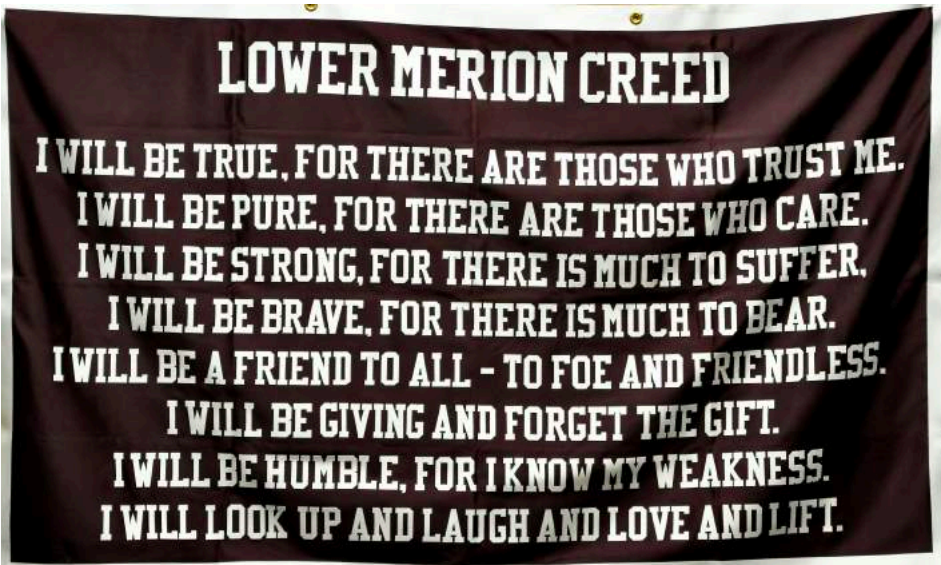


Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

The Lower Merion Creed, based off of *My Creed* by Howard A. Walter, is one that Sean Hughes recited from his first commencement to his last. "Live by the creed," he would advise to graduating seniors.



Photos courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

GIFTED ED

CHRISTINA MINECCI

Dear Sean —
As I drove down Montgomery Avenue at about 6:30 a.m. one morning this week, I saw you. Well, I saw you the way I always believed I would see you, day after day, year after year. This was clearly an older runner, choosing his steps so slowly and methodically, on the same stretch of the road where I have seen you off and on for years, loping along with your long stride and your hands, so definitively YOU.
My plan was to say goodbye at a retirement roast, where we would all talk about the funny, irreverent things that were said and done since 1998. The funny interactions with kids, the hysterical welcome back to school messages, the skating-on-the-edge moments in which we were all going to laugh or cry at the latest mandate from wherever. But the bottom line was that you always treated it as a WE situation. WE were going to manage, WE were going to get through, WE were going to work it out.
Now it is no longer WE, and it is a struggle. And it is patently unfair.
Well, in a way, it is still WE. You always said FAMILY FIRST, and often that meant our home family, but it also meant our school family. We are here, woefully unprepared for our goodbye. We are here,

Your words MATTERED over the last 23 years and I hope they continue to ring on ...

having not said the things we thought we would have had years to say, be they deeply emotional, downright amusing, or just simple thank you's. We are moving through, although I will not say moving on. Some of us cry, and that's OK. Sometimes we laugh because we can't cry, at least not yet. These emotions have a way of catching one off guard, in the hallway where we last spoke, at a meeting where someone NEEDS to make a joke that you would have made to break the tension, or driving down the road and seeing a random runner.
So, as I watched this person I never met pacing slowly down Montgomery Avenue, I said goodbye to you, so much earlier than I had planned. I know in my heart that for all of us, saying goodbye recognizes an ending point in a journey that was being traveled together. I know it will still be all right. I know we will continue the journey separately, holding onto the pleasure of traveling together for a time that mattered, in many ways. Your words MATTERED over the last 23 years and I hope they continue to ring on in our memories. Character, indeed, counts.
To those of us grieving, let me say this: "I will not say: do not weep; for not all tears are an evil." —J.R.R. Tolkien

SANDY FLOCCO

PRINCIPAL’S ASSISTANTS

ESTHER NOVAK



Photo courtesy of Sandy Flocco

The relationship between a boss and their assistant is different from other relationships they have. You are there to help in whatever capacity is needed and to make life easier for your boss. You are a “work wife,” a confidant, a mother or father, a protector. Yes, protector—sometimes from others and often from themselves. You become a member of your boss’s home family as well.

Mr. Hughes and I had that kind of relationship. Mr. Grace sent me an email, and it summed it up better than I can. He wrote, “You enabled him to be the kind of principal he wanted to be, for students and for teachers and for staff alike. You helped Sean navigate the endless waves of decisions, some life-affirming for students. You guided his day, and because you did your work, to my way of seeing it, he was the best principal he could be.”

We laughed daily, he was beyond kind, he was a friend. Many of you may not know that

Mr. Hughes was a clean freak. Everything had a place and needed to be in its place. I used to move things in his office, just a little, to see if he’d notice—of course he always did. He’d have me tape the floor around his desk when it was time to clean the carpets so his desk would go back exactly where it was.

Mr. Hughes loved his sweets. Mrs. deFranco brought Swedish Fish or Starbursts for him every Monday. He’d often yell, “Hey Sandy, do you have any of those caramel things with the cream in them?” And yes, I’d have a supply for him.

Another one of his loves was photo ops. For example, on Halloween, he’d hear that a group was dressed up and holler, “Hey San, get them back here! I want to get a photo with them,” or “Hey Sandy, I sent a few pictures for you to print out. Get frames and hang them in my office.” Mr. Hughes really loved being in front of a camera!

He arrived every day by 6 a.m., and we’d have a quick chat about what our evening or weekend had been like before he would head downstairs to work out and begin the day. Rarely did he leave for home before 6 p.m. I will miss seeing his PBJ on wheat bread in my fridge each day.

There was something magical about Mr. Hughes’s ability to make everyone feel heard, respected, and valued. Everyone wanted a minute or ten of his time, and he didn’t disappoint. He ALWAYS had time (even when he really didn’t) to talk with, listen to, or help anyone. We all felt special when he approved of something we did.

I am proud I was able to work with such a wonderful man. I will miss him terribly. He truly was one of a kind.

Mr. Hughes was a one-of-a-kind boss: he was protective, funny, and relational. I was Mr. Hughes’s secretary when he was Athletic Director as well as when he was Assistant Principal. In these types of administrative roles, many issues, both positive and negative, come across the desk. We enjoyed and celebrated the positive, and afterwards he dealt carefully with the negative. That is a behavior to which we can all aspire.

If you’ve ever been around Mr. Hughes, you know that wherever he was, there was laughter. He enjoyed life and that came across in his daily conversations. His quick wit was enviable and could quickly lighten an entire room up with laughter. If he hadn’t pursued a career in education, he would have been a fabulous standup comedian. Not only did Mr. Hughes enjoy life, but he also loved to see those around him appreciate the humorous happenings in everyday life.

Mr. Hughes valued relationships and was not an island unto himself. He was absolutely a people person and took the time to make individuals feel cared for. As Athletic Director, his focus was on supporting coaches and sponsors so that they could really enjoy building relationships with students. And if a student needed him in their corner, he was there. The same was true when

he was Assistant Principal. Sure, he had to deal with disciplinary issues, but there was no one better to have a student’s back than Mr. Hughes. While he took the time to deal with the immediate issues, he also saw the future that the student had in front of them. He wanted students to know that they were not alone, even after they made a mistake. Similarly, he would deal with parents in such a way that they knew they weren’t in their parenting role alone. If Mr. Hughes was involved in the situation, there was an ally present. He was no respecter of status or fame; rather, he treated everyone the same, whether it was Kobe Bryant or the least-known member of the class. Personal interactions were extremely important to him. Even with his busy schedule, he would take time to talk to you and let you know that you mattered. I will always hold dear those quick conversations that took place in the middle of handling the everyday workload. Taking time to build relationships and letting people know that they matter is another behavior to which we can all aspire.

Mr. Hughes was not only a boss, he was also a dear friend to me. I am deeply saddened by his passing but will honor him by taking the attributes from his life and instilling them into mine.



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

Top left: Sandy Flocco (row 2, far right) and Sean Hughes. Bottom right: Esther Novak (center) with Mr. Hughes.

GLENN BROOKS

RETIRED TEACHER

Sean Hughes started at LM one year after I did. He was a Social Studies teacher and I taught Chemistry, so we did not have a great deal of contact with one another at that time. However, when Sean became Principal, I met with him on a regular basis. I was the co-chair of the Lower Merion Senate, a committee established to discuss issues raised by staff members and to present those issues to the administration. So, once a month, Sean and I would sit down and take a few minutes to talk about staff concerns. During one of those meetings, Sean offered me some advice that I carry with me to this day. He told me that while he was interested in hearing the issues raised at the Senate meetings, he was more interested in possible solutions to the problems. Complain all you want, but present an answer to the issue. I have since used that approach with my students and my children.

I was always impressed with Sean’s enthusiasm for new ideas. If he thought that a new teaching concept would be good for the students, he supported it all the way. When the Chemistry department decided to conduct a Halloween demon-

stration day, Sean made sure that everyone knew about it. On my last Halloween in October of 2018, every administrator from both the high school and Central Administration was in attendance at some point during the day, including the Superintendent and a photographer. Sean wanted administration to see what was going on in his school.

Sean frequently used expressions such as “Be kind” and “Character Counts,” but these were not just sayings that he randomly offered to the staff and students. Sean lived that way. His kindness and energy were infectious. He always had something nice to say.

Although I am no longer a member of the LM staff, I have very fond memories of my time spent there. I like to stop by the school every now and then. I used to visit with Sean for a couple of minutes, and he always made time for me. It will be very difficult to walk into his office and not be greeted by his warm smile, his enthusiasm, and his interest in what I am doing now that I am retired.

LM has lost a wonderful administrator and a great friend. He will be missed.

ENGLISH

DANA FLYNN

When someone you know dies, it is really easy to represent the relationship you had with that person as better than it was, to make it perfect by only remembering the really good moments. I’m not going to do that. Mr. Hughes and I didn’t always agree with each other’s philosophical approach to education. He thought I was too exacting. I thought he was too lenient. Nonetheless, we both respected each other. Not every boss will let you disagree. Not every boss will listen to your point of view. Not every boss will be able to see your strengths when you’re not on the same page. But my boss could. So, without perfecting our relationship, I can truthfully say that he lived his life by his favorite motto.

For me, there is one moment that stands out from the rest that truly shows how deeply Mr. Hughes embodied “Character Counts.” Sean and I went through something traumatic last winter. It was the focal point of our life

for weeks. I believe that any boss would have been sympathetic. However, I do not believe that every boss would have been as thoughtful, supportive, and attentive as Mr. Hughes. It can be argued that if you want to get paid, you need to fulfill all aspects of your job no matter what. If you can’t focus, too bad. If you can’t stop crying, tough luck. If you can’t sleep more than two hours a night, that’s life. But we had a boss who went beyond the objective view of employment. Mr. Hughes looked at us as people, as colleagues, as friends who desperately needed his support—and he gave that to us.

In my long life of working, from paper routes, summer jobs, part-time jobs during college, and full-time work after college, Mr. Hughes was my best boss. I’m not likely to have another one like him. Every time I think of what the word “character” stands for, I will think of him, and I will miss him.

RETIRED TEACHER

SEAN FLYNN

Dana is right about Sean being a supportive and compassionate boss. In my career as a lawyer, I’ve had to supervise other lawyers and hire and fire staff. I wish I had demonstrated half the humanity in that role as Sean exemplified.

I came to know Sean as a friend during my first few years at LM, when he was an Assistant Principal and my informal mentor. We bonded over daily discussions about teaching strategies. Sean taught the same History courses that I had been assigned, and he accumulated file drawers of plans, ideas, and assessments for teaching Social Studies. He was generous with his time and he gave great advice for dealing with struggling kids. And he came to my defense when I lost it a few times in the classroom. When I was slated to be force-transferred to Harriton a while back (I had even been given the list of classes I’d teach there), Sean worked with several of my colleagues over the summer and found a way for me to stay at LM. We would run together after school with Mr. Cahill along Montgomery Avenue. We’d share stories about teaching, about our families, and about a work-life balance. After Sean became Principal, the workouts moved to the morning in what is now the weight room, where a group of us would start our day. There was a lot of fun banter there. I

had to drop out of that crew a few years ago, but Sean was always a daily fixture there.

Sean had an “inner circle” of close friends; I wasn’t in it. But I was in an “outer circle”—and Sean never made me feel there was a bit of difference. That was no more evident than during the trauma Dana wrote about. In January, I was diagnosed with ALS. Those of you who have had to deal with this in your own family know that it is a challenging disease with no cure. When I told Sean, he was devastated for me. He was also overwhelmingly supportive. I could take off as much as I wanted; he even offered to take some of my classes if I needed that. Incredibly, five weeks later, we learned that I had been misdiagnosed. I gave Sean the good news in his office and he jumped out of his chair to give me an embrace. He was as happy for me and Dana as my family was when I told them. I can now imagine the countless number of times over the years that Sean was asked to listen to and respond to the anguish and the joy of his staff and students. He embodied what we mean by being genuinely empathetic.

When I retired at the end of the school year and Sean talked to the faculty about the careers of the retiring staff, I did not really care what he said about me as a teacher; I was most gratified at Sean calling me his good friend. I’ll miss him.



Photos courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

Taken before the 2007 Broad Street Run. Hughes (front left) is pictured alongside LM colleagues, including Sean Flynn (third row, second on the right).

ALUMNI

WILL ROSENBAUM '15

When I think of Sean Hughes, I immediately think of the Mr. Lower Merion 2014 and 2015 competitions. As a contestant and then a co-MC, I had the distinct pleasure of getting to know and work closely with Mr. Hughes. Both competitions were some of my fondest memories of high school and that was in no small part thanks to LM's charismatic and energetic principal.

Mr. Hughes took his role of host very seriously. While many would have been happy to do the minimum—dress up, read the script, and crack a few jokes—that was never going to be good enough for him. That should really come as no surprise.

I will always cherish the cold wintry Saturday morning we spent filming the competition's opening video and the countless outtakes that arose from our inability to get through a joke without laughing.

Mr. Hughes made a point of having lunch with each of the candidates individually. I used to joke that lunch was my favorite subject in school and complain that the allotted time was far too little. Sitting across from Mr. Hughes only served to augment my case. Sure, he wanted to know about my act and wanted some background information to spice up his introduction, but he was also interested in getting to know me. We

chatted about soccer, jazz band, my favorite classes (the non-lunch ones, of course), and my college and career aspirations. That lunch only served to solidify what I had already suspected: LM was extremely fortunate to have a leader like him.

I am proud to say that in the moment I knew just how great of an honor it was to work with Mr. Hughes. He was a giant at LM. Many will remember him for the sharp outfits he sported at Mr. LM, but I will always remember him for the smile he wore consistently day in and day out. His grin and the genuine happiness behind it infectious spread to fourteen years of students, faculty, and staff. It assisted in fostering love for our community and the bond that myself and many others felt over calling LM our "home."

I feel resigned to the fact that describing this as "heart-wrenching" does not even begin to capture how unfair it is that the man who was so central to our collective identity at LM is no longer with us. It is merely a small consolation that his legacy will live on at 315 E. Montgomery Avenue.

Several years have passed since my time participating in Mr. LM. I often think back at how much fun it was. Now, it all feels just a bit silly that we ever showcased talents, learned dances, and made videos all in search of the next "Mr. Lower Merion"—as if he was not there on stage hosting all along.



Photo courtesy of LMSD Office of School & Community Relations

MIA SCHWARTZBERG '21

Like the many Student Council presidents before me, working alongside Principal Hughes was one of the biggest things I looked forward to for my senior year. During my first year on the Student Council Cabinet, Mr. Hughes hosted the officers in his conference room for weekly Cabinet meetings. He often went out of his way to join us in these meetings to collaborate on ideas and projects that we were planning. I will never forget when Student Council planned the Sandwich Showdown, a fundraiser for the LM and Harriton Student Councils. We started with a sandwich tasting party in the conference room, trying each DiBruno Brothers sandwich one by one. The following week, we headed over to Suburban Square to film a promotion video for the fundraiser. I never would have imagined that I would be going to the farmers market with my principal, but I just think that goes to show how willing he was to help his students and be involved with LM. Now I truly think that filming this video was maybe one of the best parts of my high school extracurricular experience. The video we made alongside Harriton's principal, Mr. Weinstein, and the Harriton Student Council was truly something else. I cannot help but smile and laugh when I rewatch the video.

As sad as I feel now, there's something about the memories that I have of my time with Mr. Hughes that makes me want to smile more than cry. I strongly suggest looking back through the Aces Nation Instagram account to see some of the things that made Mr. Hughes so special. After Mr. Hughes passed, I decided to go looking for the 2020 Maroon Madness promotion video, but stumbled upon the administrators' COVID-19 prevention music video "Covid-

busters" instead. Watching and laughing to that, I thought about how lucky LM was to have Mr. Hughes as our leader. During my time here, I admired watching Mr. Hughes not only be a mentor but a support system for the student body.

Even with the many barriers that came with planning events during the pandemic, Mr. Hughes was always looking to support Student Council. If there was anything anyone ever needed, he would respond enthusiastically ready to help. And what was even more special about that was there was no fear in reaching out to him. Mr. Hughes made sure to foster relationships that allowed for mutual respect and collaboration, with no intimidation whatsoever. I know that he did everything in his power to make the 2020-2021 school year the best it could be.

Having received the news of Mr. Hughes's passing while at college, I was seriously taken aback. I yearned to be back with the LM community. But being here instilled a deeper understanding of just how impactful Mr. Hughes was to me. No one around me understood why I was so upset after hearing about the death of my high school principal. To others, their principals were simply administrators in their high schools with which they had no personal connection. To me, Mr. Hughes was both a role model and a companion. He showed me how to be a leader and to remember that character counts. Regardless of my position in Student Council, he was there for me and wanted to see me succeed. I think that is what he really wanted for all of his students. I feel for those students at LM who never got to know Sean Hughes; however, I know that even though he is gone, his legacy will prevail and continue to support students and faculty for years to come.



Photo courtesy of Catherine McFarland

CATHERINE MCFARLAND '18

I don't think I ever saw Mr. Hughes without a smile on his face, and I don't think he ever failed to put a smile on mine. Mr. Hughes was not only a beacon of joy, but a true student advocate. I got to know him the best through Student Council. In the spirit of his motto "Character Counts," Mr. Hughes always advocated for us—even when it wasn't the easiest choice. No matter how challenging the initiative or how worrisome the opposition, when it was best for students, Mr. Hughes was our biggest supporter. Amidst safety concerns, he convinced senior administration to allow



Photo courtesy of Catherine McFarland

MICHAEL BLUNT '10

Honestly, words will never be able to explain nor describe the impact Mr. Hughes had on not only myself, but the LM community as a whole. "Character Counts" wasn't just a motto of his; it was his way of life. Mr. Hughes was someone I could always count on as a student. Whether I needed help or just an open ear to listen, he never hesitated to make himself available. We formed such a great relationship that he even attended my high school graduation barbecue, which was one of my fondest memories of him. That's the type of principal he was—he cared about his students and treated them as if they were family. His impact will forever be felt by those who were blessed enough to have been his acquaintance, and I know his legacy will live on forever through the halls of LM.



Photo courtesy of Michael Blunt



Photo courtesy of LM Student Council

VISIT THEMERIONITE.ORG TO READ MORE ALUMNI STORIES

Hughes in
THE AMAZING ACE

A MAN OF MANY ROLES: MC, MR. LM, MODEL ACE

The *Amazing Ace* is an annual fundraiser that raises thousands of dollars for various charities. Contestants compete for the title of “Amazing Ace” in a talent show-based pageant where they showcase their abilities while following a general storyline of the event based on the theme. Science teacher Nora Christman works tirelessly each year to put on a great show,

which will be significantly harder this year with the loss of Sean Hughes. Hughes was the perennial *Amazing Ace* MC, who, along with a few seniors, would help the show run smoothly and keep the audience entertained. The Arts and Entertainment Editors spoke to Mrs. Christman for her insight on Hughes’s integral participation in *The Amazing Ace*.

Q: HOW DID HUGHES INFLUENCE THE AMAZING ACE?

A: He impacted it as far as the overall feel of the event. He promoted the mindset that we should always be silly and should think about what’s going to make people laugh. So besides his physical presence, he impacted the overall culture and the mindset of the whole event.

Q: WHAT IS YOUR BEST MEMORY OF HUGHES AS MC?

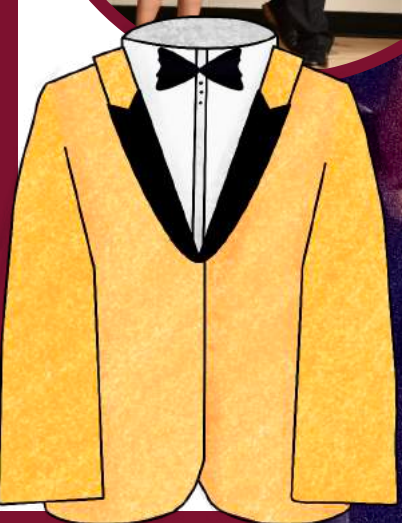
A: I always loved how personal he made it and how he would always meet with the other MC’s to go over everything. A couple weeks before the show, he would make it a point to call the contestants to his office to meet with them and the other MC’s and just chat—to get to know them, to learn interesting facts, or to get to know their talents.

Q: HOW WAS WORKING WITH HUGHES?

A: I cannot express how wonderful he had always been to me. When he was in the *Amazing Ace* space, he was 100 percent everything we needed. He would come up to me and say, “What do you need, boss?” And I’d be like “I can’t find my pen!” and he’d be like “Alright, I’ll be right back.” He really made me feel supported—he was always looking out for me.

Q: WHAT WAS HUGHES’S ROLE IN THE AMAZING ACE?

A: From my perspective, as the person who’s putting the show together, he really was an advocate for us to just have a lot of fun and do a lot of silly stuff. He was always on our side to make sure we had everything we needed to have a great show.



Even though he was such a busy guy, Mr. Hughes still made it to every practice with a huge smile on his face and jokes he always has ready. It was so heartwarming to have our principal be a part of such a time-consuming event and to show his compassion towards each charity represented. There are a million examples of Hughes’s character being exemplified over my time at LM, and *The Amazing Ace* was one of those events that showed me how much Hughes cared about his student body. You will never be forgotten, Mr. Hughes.

—ZIPHRON RUSSELL ’20

Having Hughes there in his gold jacket on stage on the night of *The Amazing Ace* was awesome. As we all know, the real *Amazing Ace* is Mr. Hughes. I mean, they might as well have just called it the Sean Hughes *Amazing Ace*. He was the fuel for all the contestants—the model citizen to base your performance on. There was no *Amazing Ace* without Mr. Hughes, so he really was the heartbeat of the entire event. I remember how proud he looked not just of the students and the staff that worked so hard for this event, but on an even simpler level—he truly was just happy to be there, and happy to be a part of it all.

—SAMSON HURWITZ ’20

Throughout the time I spent with Hughes, we had some amazing memories together, but watching him learn how to tap dance has got to be my favorite. He had to step up to the level of talented MC’s and Mrs. Christman, and he worked hard to do it. He was a little bit goofy, and made me laugh while doing it, but I was overall impressed with his skills in the end. The tradition of Hughes performing alongside students as the MC had such a big impact on the production. Hughes showed up everyday, learned what we were doing, and brought constant joy and laughter every single day. He truly formed a personal bond with everyone, whether it was the most talented performer or a member of the stage crew; he was so genuine and kind to everyone. Hughes was very warmhearted to me, but that wasn’t special treatment—it was just the energy he gave to every student who walked through his halls. Whether it was helping me out with a class, welcoming me into his office at any time, or even just coming down and sitting with my friends and I at lunch, he made you feel capable, supported, and loved, not just as a student, but as a person.

—SPENCER MILLROD ’19



He made it to every *Amazing Ace* rehearsal on time, if not five minutes early, and we had rehearsals constantly. I think I even skipped about two practices to “prioritize school work,” but at that point I was a second semester senior with minimal responsibilities. He had about the biggest job in the school and still carved out the time to attend rehearsals, year after year. I think he would have agreed with the quote that “the price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it,” because his dedication and time commitment truly reflect the respect he had for Mrs. Christman and all the contestants. My favorite memory was just brainstorming jokes to ad-lib with should there be any delays in the show. We would come up with the stalest, dumbest, most unfunny jokes, and he still laughed. He really was the face of the event! Hughes was responsible for so much traction that *The Amazing Ace* had in the community. His love and continued dedication year after year really energized contestants and other production members and definitely increased the number of attendees. It was just such a passionate, goofy, uplifting environment: these kids were putting in so much work to provide a little entertainment and raise a lot of money for meaningful causes. I think he understood the upperclassmen involvement as the good character he always preached being put into practice.

—IZZY BRUCKMAN ’20

THE CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS

A principal, cheerleader, Athletic Director, and Ace who left it all out there for others to achieve their dreams

Mr. Hughes always found ways to engage with students and staff in our activities and athletics program. His participation could simply be a drop by or stop in; however, most of the time, it included direct involvement in the planning or production of a show, concert, or competition. Mr. Hughes’s involvement brought energy, spirit, and passion to these various activities and competitions, but more importantly, it brought energy, spirit, and passion to us, the students and staff of LM. We the students and staff of LM and our experiences here at our school were always his “WHY.” I am forever grateful for my time working with Mr. Hughes and want to continue to honor his memory with all of you by keeping our school’s focus on the experiences of our students and staff.

—JASON STROUP, ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

Sean Hughes. A great man, leader, and role model who loved Aces Sports and supported every team. The times when he came to watch us practice were always yearly highlights for the team—and you knew it was a big game when he was present. When I remember him, I will think of three words: kindness, positivity, and equity. He believed anything was possible for his students and went out of his way to make it happen. Aces Nation misses him greatly and we are devoting our season to his legacy and principles.

—GREGG DOWNER, BASKETBALL HEAD COACH

Mr. Hughes had an incredible passion for Central League Athletics. Combine this passion with his love of education and students, and you have what I consider the perfect principal. His dedication to the Central League was felt across all twelve schools, all while running one of the best high schools in the country. Principal Hughes will be missed by all of us, but he will never be forgotten.

—MIKE FRIEL, RADNOR ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

Mr. Hughes was a gift to LM and embodied and promoted the values we strive for as a team. As many coaches and student athletes experienced, he was a great supporter of athletics as a key part of the educational process. Mr. Hughes was always interested in and excited about LMXC. While most of my encounters with him were limited to random meetings in the hallways, I already miss his “Hey coach, the team is looking awesome this year!”

—DAVID VAN HOUTEN, CROSS COUNTRY HEAD COACH

I began my time here at LMSD a short four months ago as Harriton’s new Director of Athletics and Student Activities. While my time getting to know Mr. Hughes and his relationship to Central League Athletics and LMSD athletics was brief, I quickly learned that Mr. Hughes loved student participation and respectful competition in both LMSD and in the Central League. Athletic directors always spoke highly of Mr. Hughes as president of the Central League. Mr. Hughes was clearly student-centered and willing to do whatever it took to provide opportunity for all students. I know that he is missed by many and will forever be remembered for the contributions he made for not only LMSD students, but all students in the Central League.

—SEAN ALBERT, HARRITON ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

A MAN ON A MISSION

Sports Editors

A constant participant in athletics throughout his life, Sean Hughes was the bedrock of LM athletics during his tenure here as teacher, Director of Athletics, and Principal. Hughes loved boating on the Chesapeake Bay and had a passion for running, completing two decades of the Broad Street Run. He especially enjoyed coaching, or “sideline” coaching, his children in baseball and softball. From crew to basketball, Hughes was present at every game he could attend, no matter how busy his schedule was. Countless pictures over the years show Hughes embracing coaches, screaming in support for players, and cheering with students on the sidelines. All of these pictures depict his true nature: a man who loved all of the games, the spirit, and most importantly, the athletes.

One of Hughes’s core beliefs was that athletics and non-academic school activities were an integral part of learning at LM and showed students their other talents. Countless students recount how he would keep up with their personal athletics and how he strived to be with them throughout their athletic careers at LM and beyond. Whether it was a freshman walking through the building after a late practice or a senior on National Signing Day, Hughes had a unique way of connecting with his student athletes. Statistics, accomplishments, and big plays are visible to everyone; however, Hughes knew better than anyone the personality underpinning each athlete. He recognized everyone’s success in these different facets and made them proud of their accomplishments. The simple connections he made with students, like those days before school in the weight room, were all reflective of his beaming personality and loving character.

Hughes joined LM in 1998 as a teacher and Assistant Athletic Director, before quickly stepping in as Athletic Director in 2002. After he assumed the role of Principal in 2008, he turned his focus toward reforming Central Athletic League leadership. Under the existing system, the league presidency rotated among the principals of each school, no matter if they were seasoned veterans or only novice administrators. After a new principal took the reins of the league, Hughes took it upon himself to instruct the new principal on how to handle the presidency. Realizing the flawed rotational system, Hughes offered to become the permanent president of the league, taking up full charge of the athletics for the area. This demonstration from Hughes represented both his shrewdness and selflessness, constantly thinking of the needs of others over the demands he already shouldered.

Every story about Hughes and athletics seems to revolve around a similar theme: his value as a cheerleader. However, Hughes’s cheerleading was not just the “Go LM” and a show of participation simply out of obligation. Every cheer from Hughes was his way of showing how much he cared for his students and how much he believed in each one of them. Each roar of support showed how he believed every student was part of himself. Hughes consistently proved to be caring on and off the field. Whether it was supporting athletes in the Kobe Bryant Gymnasium, on the sidelines of Arnold Field, checking in with athletes between classes, or visiting during practices, he was a constant, positive presence in the lives of LM athletes and the entire Central Athletic League.

Sean was always a wonderful principal and enthusiastic supporter of all student activities. You would never know when he would decide to watch practice, but he was embraced by the rowers for showing interest every time he did drop in. He even made a point to attend regattas as often as possible every year. He will be missed and my hope is to continue to help fill the big shoes he left.

—KIRK BECKMAN, CREW HEAD COACH