

AUGUST 2022



DEI NEWSLETTER

PLEASE CONTACT TERRA OR LESA IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING

WHAT'S INSIDE?

SUICIDE PREVENTION	Page 2
BETTER ALLIES (BOOK CLUB)	Page 6
UNCONSCIOUS BIAS (VOTING)	Page 8
NOTABLE DATES	Page 9
PRIDE IN WEST MICHIGAN	Page 10
A WORLD OF ADVENTURE	Page 12



Suicide Prevention

WRITTEN BY

DAWN SNYDER

TRIGGER WARNING



This article contains potentially disturbing content that includes graphic references to self harm and suicide.

I remember sitting in the waiting room of the therapist's office on a Tuesday afternoon, waiting for my son to complete an evaluation with a doctor. I had a few hours to enjoy some quiet time and read a book when the doctor stopped in and asked that I come into his office to discuss something. When I sat down, I realized my son was no longer in the room, it was just me and the doctor. The doctor started to tell me that he had my son's permission to share what he was about to tell me. My mind was already going in a hundred different directions about what this was about, but not one of the thoughts I had was what he was about to say. The doctor started to tell me how my son let him know that not only did he have thoughts of ending his life, but he had made a plan of how he was actually going to do so. Not only had he planned it, but he had also walked through the process. He took a shotgun, went behind the garage, held the gun... and then he stopped. I was told he thought of me in that moment, he thought of how my heart would be shattered and how I would have been the one to find him. He was 15 years old. I was encouraged to take this seriously; Jackson was still contemplating taking his life. He did not want to be here anymore, and he still knew the way in which he would take his life, if or when he decided to.

Jackson was being treated for depression; we never had an inkling that he wanted to end his life. He never once made me, or my husband, think he was that unhappy. My knee jerk reaction was to never leave him unattended again. While that is unrealistic, we did find ways in which to help Jackson and luckily, he is still here with us today. He still struggles with depression, as he probably always will, but he has been given the tools to help him when he feels like he would be better off no longer here. We know now what to watch for.

As of 2019, in the US, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death. That is tens of thousands of deaths each year, while millions of people attempt suicide each year. In 2020, an estimated 12.2 American adults seriously thought about suicide, 3.2 million planned a suicide attempt, and 1.2 million attempted suicide. You may be asking, why do people kill themselves? There is no simple answer to that, but there are risk factors, some of which are depression (and other mental illnesses), hopelessness, feeling like a burden, stressful situations (financial issues), and isolation.





Here are some common myths & facts about suicide:

- **MYTH** – Teens are at greatest risk. Teen suicides are more likely to make the news, the elderly are more likely to take their own life.
- **MYTH** – Depression is always the cause of suicide. While it is a risk factor, and it does remain one of the biggest risk factors, alcoholism plays a role in 1 in 3 completed suicides.
- **FACT** – Most suicide attempts fail. Fortunately, only 1 in every 10 to 25 attempts results in death.
- **FACT** – Treatment cuts suicide risk. If you successfully treat depression, suicidal ideation declines.
- **MYTH** – Fewer people are calling hotlines. One way to reach out for help is to call a suicide hotline.

Starting on July 16, 2022, Michigan started 988 – a three digit, easy to remember number to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This will be available 24/7, 365 days a year to anyone for free, confidential support for those people in distress. It is also for an individual who is worried about a loved one and not sure how to support that person or where to get help. The Lifeline currently provides services in English and Spanish as uses translation services in over 250 additional languages.

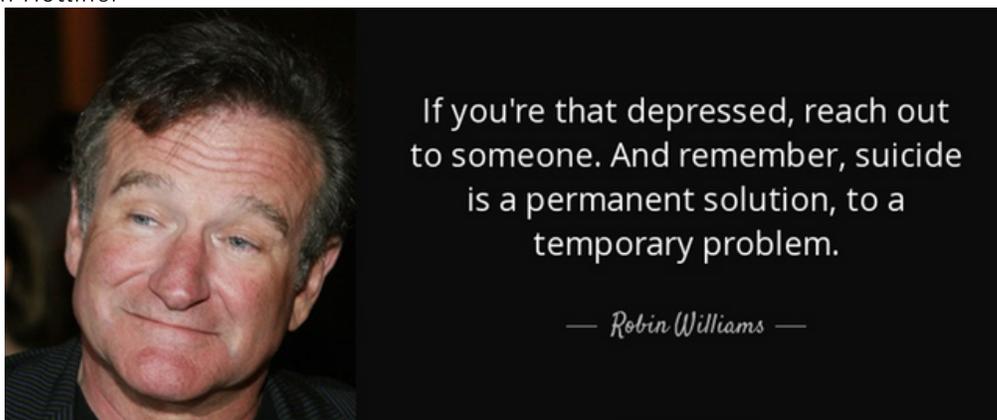
While suicide can be a surprise to a loved one, often suicidal people send out warning signs beforehand. Signs to look out for include someone talking about death frequently or mentioning suicide. Being sad on occasion is normal, but prolonged sadness is another sign, or a change in behavior – someone once outgoing opts out of all activities. If someone you know starts making a plan (getting their affairs in order, writing goodbye letters, etc.) or obtaining a means for suicide such as purchasing a gun, these are also warning signs.

How can we prevent suicide? It requires strategies at all levels of society. Everyone can help prevent suicide by learning the warning signs, promoting prevention, and committing to social change. According to the CDC, strategies to prevent suicide include strengthening economic supports, strengthening access and delivery of suicide care, create protective environments, promote connectedness, teach coping and problem-solving skills, identify and support people at risk, and lessen harms and prevent future risk. If you observe warning signs, take them seriously. Express your concerns, open the conversation and check in with them, offer support, encourage help, and remind them that it is OK to struggle and that you are there to listen.

If you are feeling suicidal, you are not alone. And there is hope. Here are a few things that people who were once suicidal would like you to know:

- 1 – You are enough!**
- 2 – You matter.**
- 3 – Take it day by day, hour by hour or minute by minute if you need to.**
- 4 – Do not feel ashamed of the thoughts you are having. You are not alone.**
- 5 – You are strong.**

If you or someone you know is in crisis, there is help available. Call 988 for the National Suicide Prevention Hotline.



Race and ethnicity

- Age-adjusted suicide rates are highest among non-Hispanic AI/AN people (23.9 per 100,000) and non-Hispanic white people (16.9 per 100,000) compared to other racial and ethnic groups.

Middle-aged adults (aged 35-64 years) account for 47.2% of all suicides in the United States.

- Among middle-aged men, the rates were highest for non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaskan Native (AI/AN) men (36 per 100,000) followed closely by non-Hispanic white men (35.3 per 100,000)
- Among middle-aged women, the rates were highest among white women (10.5 per 100,000) and Non-Hispanic AI/AN women (9.8 per 100,000)

Persons who identify as LGBTQ

- 23.4% of high school students identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual reported attempting suicide during the past 12 months. This rate is nearly four times higher than the rate reported among heterosexual students.

Veterans

- People who have previously served in the military account for about 13.7% of suicides among adults in the United States.

INFORMATION FROM:

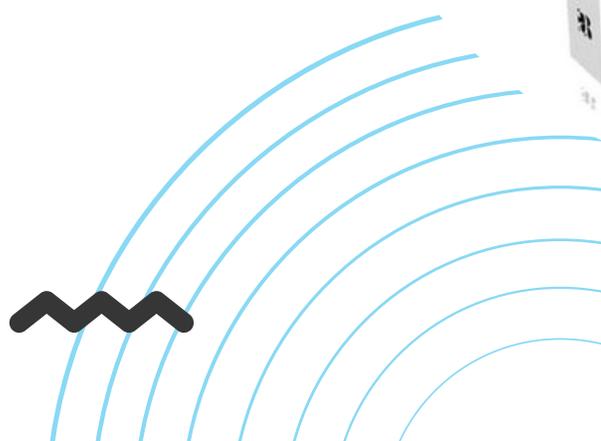
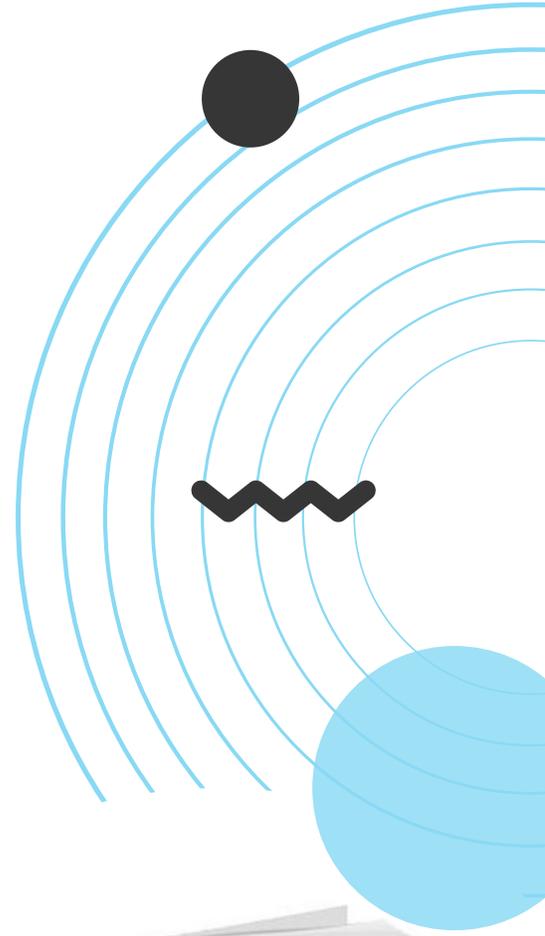
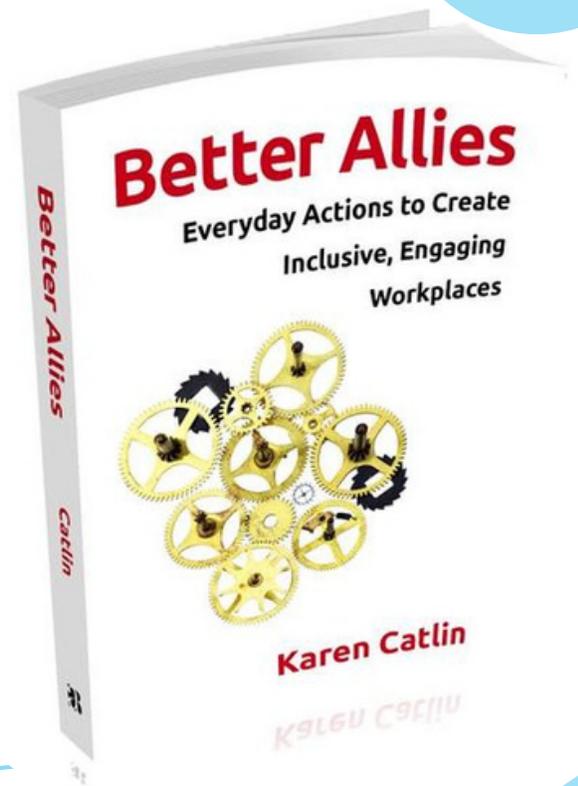
- CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, NATIONAL CENTER FOR INJURY PREVENTIONS AND CONTROL. WEB-BASED INJURY STATISTICS QUERY AND REPORTING SYSTEM(WISQARS) [ONLINE]. [FEB 17, 2021]
- IVEY-STEPHENSON AZ, DEMISSIE Z, CROSBY AE ET AL. SUICIDAL IDEATION AND BEHAVIORS AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS – YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY, UNITED STATES. 2019. MMWR SUPPL 2020;69(SUPPL-1):47-55.
- DEPARTMENT OF VETERAN'S AFFAIRS: 2021 NATIONAL VETERAN SUICIDE PREVENTION ANNUAL REPORT. 2021. [ACCESSED: SEP 9, 2021].

Better Allies

Everyday Actions to
Create Inclusive,
Engaging Workplaces

BY KAREN CATLIN

ARTICLE BY KERRY BEAN



The book we selected for our most recent book club discussion was *Better Allies: Everyday Actions To Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces* by Karen Catlin. From her website^[1], "Karen Catlin is a leadership coach and an acclaimed author and speaker on inclusive workplaces. After spending twenty-five years building software products and serving as a vice president of engineering at Macromedia and Adobe, she witnessed a sharp decline in the number of women working in tech. Frustrated but galvanized, she knew it was time to switch gears." The author has worked with Fortune 500 companies and her writing has appeared in *Inc.*, *the Daily Beast*, *Fast Company*, and *Muse*.

I thought this turned out to be a very interesting book with very practical applications and frequent illustrative examples. *Better Allies* presents a thorough overview of what it means to be an ally and includes practical steps to be a better ally. Like many things in life, allyship is a journey, not a destination. That is, we should strive to have an open mind and be open to continuous learning and absorbing new information about how to leverage our privilege to support others.

Early in the book, the author introduces a list of fifty potential privileges in the office for the readers to use as a self-assessment tool to take an inventory of our potential privileges – not to cause guilt or shame, but to provide an inventory of advantages we can use as an ally to leverage for others in the workplace who may not have those advantages. This helped me to realize that several people over my career provided opportunities for me to grow and now as an ally, I can pay forward opportunities for others to grow.

Active allies in positions of privilege can use their position to help others be successful. Allies can play a variety of roles from The Sponsor to The Champion, The Amplifier, the Advocate, The Scholar, The Upstander, and The Confidant. However, as allies we need to be careful to be an ally and not a knight. A knight rides in to save the day whereas an ally takes actions to empower others and create systemic change, not to rescue others or put oneself in the spotlight.

I do not want to give away the rest of the book, but the author moves from starting the ally journey to shifting our own behavior to be a more effective ally to others and tells us how we can increase our impact as an ally. *Better Allies* is a quick and easy read that I heartily recommend so I hope you can take the time to read about how we can all create an inclusive and engaging workplace for everyone.

[1] <https://karencatlin.com/about/>

— BRETT KARHOFF —

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

I recently went on a walk with a friend and the last thing he said was “don't forget to vote tomorrow”. I was thankful for the reminder and I woke up bright and early the next morning to make sure I cast my votes.

It was the primary election, so having to vote a straight party ticket was pretty easy since, in most cases, there was only one candidate running. However, towards the end of the ballot, there were some random positions like Deputy Historian of the 56th District (or something like that?!) and there were two individuals listed. Admittedly, I had neglected to do my homework on these candidates, but felt it was my civic duty to vote for one of them.

Looking at the names on the ballot, I reached the conclusion that one was a younger Asian male (Lucas Chen) and one was an older Caucasian female (Eleanor Jones). In a split second, based solely on their names, I created social stereotypes based on gender, race, and age to determine whether Lucas or Eleanor would be the better Deputy Historian. I filled in the appropriate circle, put the ballot back in the sleeve, and fed it into the machine. After affixing the “I voted” sticker to my shirt, I realized that I just experienced an unexpected example of unconscious bias.



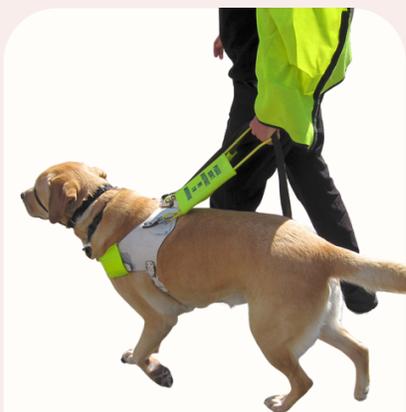
Like it or not, we all have elements of unconscious bias (also known as implicit bias). The biases we possess are influenced based on background, personal experiences, societal stereotypes, and cultural context. Learning what your biases are is a great first step for self-awareness and can help improve your decision-making skills as well as helping the firm build a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

Check out this interesting site created by Harvard University to test your implicit bias in over 15 categories...the results may surprise you!

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

NOTABLE DATES

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!



I N C L U S I O N



AUGUST

National Civility Month

August 9 - International Day of World's Indigenous People

August 13 - Left-Handers Day

August 19 - World Humanitarian Day

August 21 - Senior Citizens Day

August 22 - American Businesswomen's Day

August 26 - Women's Equality Day

SEPTEMBER

Hispanic Heritage Month

National Guide Dog Month

Suicide Prevention Month

September 6 - Patriot Day

September 16 - Mexican Independence Day

September 21 - International Day of Peace

September 23 - National Native American Day

September 25 - Rosh Hashanah begins

September 26 - European Day of Languages

September 27 - World Tourism Day

PRIDE IN WEST MICHIGAN

ANTHONY KOHLER



This was the first year that I attended Pride festivals in West Michigan (Muskegon and Grand Rapids). I used to go to the Pride parade every year when I lived in Minneapolis and have visited Chicago and Columbus Pride. Those Pride festivals have been around for decades and attract millions of visitors. By comparison, West Michigan's festivals are cozier. They feel home-grown and authentic. While society has grown more accepting, many LGBTQ+ young people still grow up with stigma, bullying and intolerance. Transgender kids in particular keep landing in the political crossfire. Many people I spoke with in Muskegon and Grand Rapids had never been to a Pride festival and were thankful that their communities were recognizing them. I helped greet attendees at HN's Pride booth in Grand Rapids and handed out stickers. I have never personally interacted with so many gender-non-conforming people and it was beautiful to celebrate our shared humanity. We are all worthy of kindness, respect and love.

You may have noticed that each year there are more Pride celebrations around Michigan. While Michigan's first Pride parade was the "Christopher Street Detroit '72" liberation march, most Pride celebrations started in the 21st century. In 2022, there were over 30 Pride celebrations in the state, with most of them taking place in June. Here is a little bit of information and history about a few in West Michigan.

Newest Pride Celebrations in West Michigan:

- Lowell Pride (June 4) - This is only the second year that the small town has held a Pride celebration. It took place along the popular river walk and drew a few hundred visitors.
- Muskegon Pride (June 4) - The city celebrated its first ever Pride celebration downtown with 80 vendors, speeches, live music and entertainment and hands-on activities.
- Big Rapids (June 26) - 2022 was the first/inaugural Pride celebration in Big Rapids with sponsorships from Ferris State University and the City of Big Rapids among others.

More Established Pride Festivals in West Michigan:

- Allegan County/Saugatuck-Douglas (June 1-5) - This year's Pride celebrations included Rocky Horror Picture Show, Drag Bowling Party, LGBTQ History Lecture, Care-A-Van Car Parade, Pride in the Park, Brunch and Dance Parties.
- Kalamazoo Pride (June 3) - The first Kalamazoo Pride was held in 2007. It draws approximately eight thousand attendees annually and is the second largest Pride festival in West Michigan after Grand Rapids.
- Grand Rapids Pride (June 18) - The first GR Pride festival took place in 1988. It returned this year for its 34th annual celebration and drew over twenty thousand attendees.
- Holland Pride (June 25) - The celebration was held at Centennial Park and featured food trucks, music, story times, a magician, crafts, games, face painting, and an inclusive D&D campaign.
- Benton Harbor/St Joseph Pride (June 25) Outcenter Southwest Michigan has hosted the event annually since 2013 with celebrations in both cities.

Consider volunteering at the HN booth at one of the Pride festivals next summer. We'd love it if you'd join us.

exchange students



Ever since I was young, I recall wanting to host an exchange student, and travel the world. I am pretty sure I was destined to be a host mom and I can proudly say I am now a host mom to two amazing international host daughters! Being a host family is such a wonderful experience. It takes a lot to invite someone into your home and your family, but from my experience and stories I have heard from others, it is the opportunity of a lifetime!

When the opportunity first presented itself five years ago, I was beyond excited. Our family went through the process of getting certified for the program by filling out a family profile and going through a home study and background check. The local coordinator shared a few student profiles with us, and we were able to narrow it down to the country we wanted and a student we thought would best fit with our family. We chose Italy because our daughter Bella is of Italian descent; her grandfather immigrated from Sicily and they have a very large Italian family, so we thought it might be nice to have a little bit of home while she was here. Once the principal at our high school, Forest Hills Central ("FHC"), approved Giulia we were able to have our first video call with her and her family, and it was the start of a friendship and an extended family relationship that continues to this day.

Giulia arrived in August 2017, a few weeks before school started and stayed until school finished in June 2018. We went on many travel adventures together including Grand Haven, Holland, Mackinac Island, Torch Lake (thanks Chris Harper!), Boston, Atlanta, California, Traverse City and the M22 route, and Chicago. Some of the fun experiences we had were going to a Boston Red Sox game at Fenway Park, a Michigan football game, the Nutcracker Ballet, taking her to cut down a real Christmas tree, visiting Hollywood and Southern California, and introducing her to all the great American meals and holiday celebrations.



A few common highlights of an exchange student's time in the United States that they normally do not get to experience in their home country include high school football games, homecoming & prom, and school sports. During Giulia's time in the US, she participated on the bowling team and the rowing team and made some great friendships along the way. She was able to attend the Homecoming dance, Winterfest dance, and Prom. She was very studious, coming with a high level of English, and she also studied French, Greek, and Latin. She spent time with Bella and her friends from school and the church youth group and made some close friends of her own. She also connected with other exchange students in the area. Giulia taught us about Italian and European culture, and we shared our American culture and traditions.

We FaceTimed with Giulia's family often throughout her stay and she kept in touch with them daily as well. Her parents, Mario & Giovanna, and sister, Ada, arrived in Grand Rapids the last week she was here, and we were able to show them around town and the school where Giulia spent her time. We also took them to Holland, Grand Haven, and Chicago and had such a wonderful time together!



Giulia became our Italian daughter and we love her like she is our own. Her family also became part of our family, and we schedule a video call every few months as well as keeping up on birthdays, holidays, and special life events via WhatsApp and Instagram. Giulia's sister Ada will be arriving this month for her exchange program in Arkansas, and we hope to visit her while she is in the US. We are also hoping that Giulia and her parents can come and visit next summer as well!

A year after her stay with us, we had the opportunity to travel to Italy to visit Giulia and her family. We started in Milan and traveled to Verona, Venice, Siena, Rome, Sorrento, Capri, and Sicily. It was such a blessing to be able to experience Italy alongside our Italian family, learn some of the language, eat the most amazing food, and witness firsthand so many historical sights!

We were open to hosting another student but did not know when the right time would be. We explored hosting two students last fall and had been accepted by the organization we worked with, but our school district was not accepting any more students at the time. A few months later we learned of a student, Mariana, that was in our school district and in need of a new host family. We filled out our paperwork, submitted our background checks, and had our home study on Wednesday. By Saturday our new host daughter Mariana moved in and forever became our Spanish daughter!

Mariana is from Coruna, Spain which is north of Portugal. Her English was very good and along with speaking Spanish she also spoke Galician (another language in Spain) and studied French. She had a wonderful personality, was quick witted and direct, but also incredibly loving and kind and warmed up to our family right away. It was the weekend before Thanksgiving, so our daughter was able to come home from college a few days later so they could connect. Snapchat helped as well, especially when Bella had to go back to college after the holidays, but the bond they built is so strong!

Mariana wanted to live the High School Musical dream and I am confident that she did! She attended the Winterfest dance and received her very own "promposal" for Prom. Mariana had a pretty full calendar as she participated in the Greater Grand Rapids Figure Skating Club at Patterson Ice Arena, was the team manager for the FHC Boys Hockey Team, and participated in Track & Field in the spring. She also had the opportunity to volunteer with Kids' Food Basket and she was a math tutor for her American friends. She had an amazing group of friends at FHC and a close group of friends from Spain that she met through the exchange program and were attending a few other local schools in West Michigan.



I was a bit busier with work this past year, but we didn't let that stop us from having our travel adventures and many nights of laughter and fun. We traveled to Atlanta to visit family for Christmas, California for spring break, a few trips to Ohio for Bella's college lacrosse games, Chicago, and New York. Some of her favorite things were seeing the Hollywood sign and other places in LA that were from her favorite movies. We introduced her to baseball, attending a Cubs game in Chicago and a Yankees game in New York, but she was not as impressed, except for the foam finger. She loved seeing the beluga whales at Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, all of New York, but especially the New York Public library as she is an avid reader. Her favorite American food chains/restaurants were Chick-fil-A, Culvers, First Wok, and Fruition. She made us her famous Spanish omelette and churros and assisted me as I was learning Spanish. I often asked her how to pronounce words in Spanish, and her Spanish accent was so strong that I had to ask her to spell the word. We had a running joke that my husband asked me to translate her English at times too because she spoke so fast. Our home was always filled with laughter! Mariana spoke with her mom everyday via FaceTime and kept up with her Spanish friends, too. Normally the exchange student programs want the students to have some distance from their family so they can be fully immersed in the culture and language, but as a parent I can only imagine how hard it would be for my child to be away for so long, so we didn't mind, and it was great to be able to get to know her mom and dad better as well. We had so many wonderful times with Mariana, and we hope to be able to visit her and her family in Spain in the future!

Bella mentioned that one of the best parts of hosting both of our exchange students was the bond she developed with them. As an only child, it often felt lonely for her, and now she will forever have her host sisters (and host brother, but that is an article for another time J). A special occasion for both of our host daughters was being able to go to the same restaurant in Palm Springs. The first time we went, the two waiters pictured had immigrated from Sicily and were beginning their American dream. Four years later Emilio was now the owner of the restaurant and truly living the American dream...also some of the best Italian food we have had (in the US)!

If you are interested in hosting an exchange student or would like to learn more, I have included a few of the agencies that our students were part of and a third program that my friend works for.

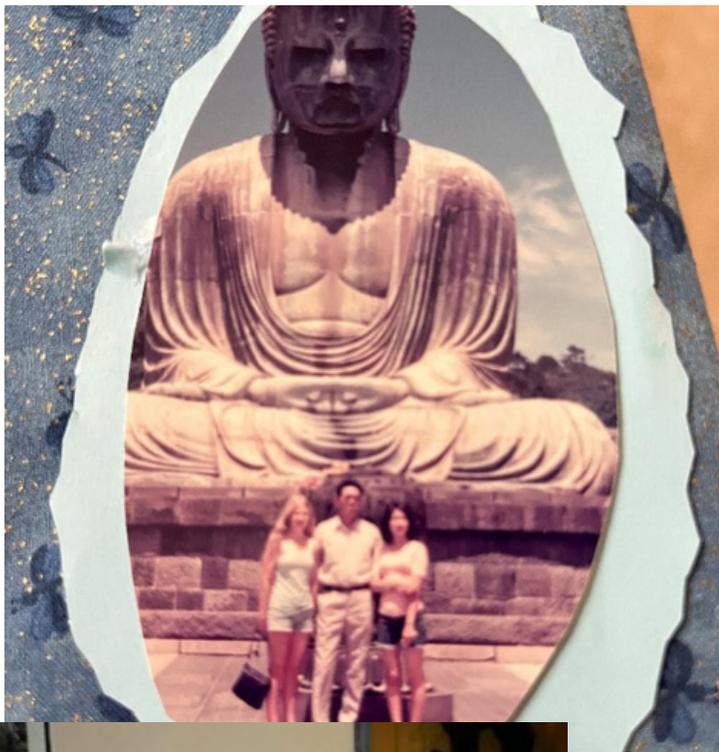
- STS Foundation: <https://www.stsfoundation.org/>
- CIEE: <https://www.ciee.org/>
- FLAG: <https://www.flag-intl.org/>

I also had the opportunity to interview a few of our Hungerford Nichols team members who were exchange students and hosted students as well. They shared some wonderful stories and a few fun photos.

Enjoy!



Lesya Petrucci



In middle school, Lesya participated in an exchange program through 4-H. Her family hosted a student from Japan, Miki, during the summer and then the following year Lesya had the opportunity to travel to Japan and stay with her host sister and her family. At such a young age, Lesya experienced a few firsts including her first plane ride (and international at that) and train ride, sitting on the floor to eat vs. the traditional table format most of us are accustomed to, using chopsticks instead of utensils, and living in the city vs. a farm where Lesya grew up. I asked if she was scared to be so young and in a foreign place without her family, but she said she was not. Her host family in Japan was very welcoming and made her feel at ease. They even bought her utensils so that she could feel more at home instead of having to use chopsticks. It is also common to have the whole fish for a meal, which was not as appealing to Lesya, and she recalls how accommodating the family was for her. While in Japan, Lesya was able to do group activities with other American students and her host family took her on various outings as well. Unfortunately, they lost touch over the years, as it was pre social media, but she had a few photos from her time in Japan to share with us.



Later in life, Lesya and her husband hosted a student from Spain, Carmela, when their daughter Brianna was in high school and then Brianna went to Spain the following summer, and they still communicate today! Lesya's sister also participated in the exchange student program when she was younger and a few years ago, her other sister was able to host a student, Sigrid, from Denmark. Sigrid was able to join Lesya and her family on a trip to New York while she was here, and she will be making the trip back to the US to attend a family wedding this fall. Hosting and being an exchange student were very memorable for Lesya, and I am so glad I got to learn and share part of her story!



STEPHEN SHIRA

The summer before starting his senior year at Rockford High School, Stephen and his AP German class traveled to Germany on a three-week exchange program. He stayed with a host family for the first and last week and traveled with his class for the second week of the trip. During his first week, he spoke only in German, but if needed, the family could speak English with him, and the final week of his trip they asked him to speak more English so they could practice. On top of speaking German, his host family spoke French and Spanish, as his host parents were natives of France and Chile. They met in college during a study abroad program in Germany and moved there after getting married, raising their children there. Another example of how these programs bring people together from all walks of life!

During the second week of his trip, Stephen and his AP German class traveled to Berlin and visited the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. He recalls how quiet and eerie it was even from a block away and the smell of the camp as you entered it. I have not been to Germany yet, but in researching the camp and seeing the pictures Stephen shared, I can only imagine the horror of that time and it brings tears to my eyes as I write this article.

A couple of fun highlights from Stephen's trip were the food, specifically Döner which is like a Greek gyro, and being on the same airplane as former Detroit Redwings players Nicklas Lidström and Henrik Zetterberg. He didn't see them, but if you are a hockey player like Stephen, just being on the same plane is pretty cool!

Stephen and his family hosted Cecilia the following year, and during her time in the US, she had to document her journey and then present in English to her teacher when she returned home. They took her on a trip to Chicago as one of her main requests was to see the tall skyscrapers and a big city for a few days. Cecilia was amazed at the size of the Great Lakes, as they don't have big lakes like that in Germany, so they took her to Lake Michigan in Grand Haven. Cecilia and Pia, another foreign exchange student, wanted to travel to a Lions game while they were here as well. Lastly, Stephen's family took her to Washington D.C. at her request to see all the monuments and the White House. Stephen stays in touch with his host family and thanks to text messaging and Snapchat he communicates often with Cecilia and her brothers (his host brothers) Ruben & Tristan.





CLAUDIA LEASON

At the age of 17, Claudia traveled to a little town outside of Missoula, Montana. She had just finished her senior year of high school in Mexico and was able to come to the United States as an exchange student for an American senior year. She lived with a wonderful host family and had four host siblings. As most exchange students do, Claudia tried out for a few of the sports teams including basketball and track & field. She didn't realize how competitive American sports were, and although she did not make the basketball team, she was still able to be part of the team for the season.

When she came to the US, Claudia had a good base of the English language, but she mentioned it was easier for her to read in English than to speak it early on. I can relate as I am working on learning Spanish and find that I can see a word and quickly translate, but trying to formulate a sentence is a bit harder. She said, "When you start dreaming in English is when you know you have made it." She took normal classes at school, but also took the mandatory classes of English and U.S. History. She also had the opportunity to travel with her host family to Yellowstone and South Dakota. Claudia stays in contact with her host family still through phone calls and Facebook.



Claudia's siblings also participated in the exchange student program over the years and four of her siblings were able to stay with a host family in Iowa. Years later Claudia's nephew was able to stay with the same host family as well! Claudia's family and their Iowa host family, the Alpen's, remained close over the years and still to this day. They attended Claudia's college graduation and wedding and important family events and in 2019, a few of Claudia's siblings traveled to the US to help surprise their host dad Ron Alpen for his 80th birthday. It was such a special time, and one Claudia will cherish forever as it was the last time that they were able to see him before he passed away.