

# Then & Now

The Mabin School Alumni Newsletter SUMMER 2016



# Thoughts from Mabin

**Nancy Steinhauer**  
Principal

I fell in love with Mabin over 20 years ago when I first came to visit as a young teacher. The School seemed like an incubator of creativity where the joy of learning and curiosity were actively nurtured. I have always hoped for an opportunity to join The Mabin School, and I can clearly see its potential as a centre of excellence for inquiry-based learning and holistic education. Mabin has much to contribute in a world where children need to learn “how to think, not what to think.”

How apt, then, that The Mabin School has just recently been designated one of Canada’s first Changemaker Schools by the Ashoka Foundation. And how fitting for Gerry’s vision of creating the ultimate learning space. *In this edition of **Then & Now**, we feature both teachers and students from Mabin who have become changemakers in their own right. As we move forward into the next era, we will create the next generation of original thinkers, adaptive leaders and caring citizens – the next generation of changemakers.*

In my career, I have always been drawn to opportunities to help schools get better. I am excited to work with the students, staff, parents and extended Mabin community to make this great school even more excellent.

This is where you come in. I am trying to learn as much about Mabin as I can. I need your help! Whatever your connection to Mabin, I want to understand your perspective. Please drop me a line, or even better, drop in, introduce yourself and tell me your stories about the School. I want to know everything! If you were a student at Mabin, please fill out our alumni survey which can be found at [mabin.com](http://mabin.com) on the “Stay Connected” tab. And follow us on Facebook!

I look forward to many conversations, the occasional debate, and always the opportunity to learn more about this magical place. Mabin is on the move; we are going to change the world. With the strength of our community and the talent that lies within it, imagine what we can do from here.

## Our Grads are Making a Change

Grads, we wish you the best of luck next year and beyond. We know you will find great success and will represent Mabin well. We look forward to seeing you at our Grade 7 reunion and as volunteers at Mabin in the future.

### WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

**BISHOP STRACHAN SCHOOL**  
Devon

**GREENWOOD COLLEGE SCHOOL**  
Owen  
Ronan  
Sasha  
Tralee

**HAVERGAL COLLEGE**  
Emily  
Emlyn  
Jeanne

**THE LINDEN SCHOOL**  
Evy



**ROYAL ST. GEORGE’S COLLEGE**  
Alexander  
Carter  
Zachary

**TDSB**  
Saul

**UPPER CANADA COLLEGE**  
Ben  
Daniel  
Jack

**UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SCHOOLS**  
Adam

# Mabin is an Ashoka Changemaker School!

In May of this year, The Mabin School became one of two Canadian Ashoka Changemaker Schools. Ashoka is an international organization whose mission is to support the most powerful force for good in the world: the social entrepreneur, whose innovative ideas can help to correct social problems. Since its inception, Ashoka has worked to identify and support the world's leading social entrepreneurs in making far-reaching change.

In 2012, Ashoka launched the Changemaker Schools program, recognizing schools that do an outstanding job of cultivating empathy, teamwork, leadership and problem solving in kids. In other words, schools that foster the social entrepreneurs of the future. Ashoka schools are known to be innovative and influential places that develop the leaders of today and tomorrow in their teachers and students.

Like Ashoka, Mabin believes that everyone can be a changemaker. From the beginning, Gerry Mabin envisioned a progressive school with students and teachers as partners in learning, each honoured for their original thinking, leadership qualities and care for community. With creativity and innovation woven into daily life, it's no surprise that The Mabin School is viewed by Ashoka as part of a new paradigm of education.

Mabin now belongs to an international community of leading elementary, middle and high schools that cultivate students as changemakers and are willing to take risks in new ways of learning. As a Changemaker School, Mabin has also been recognized for having the reputation and relevance needed to influence other schools and educators.

Stay tuned over the upcoming year to hear about how Mabin develops changemakers within the school and takes its message and methods to the education community!



**MABIN STAFF** create a piece of public art to represent what it means to be a Changemaker School.



**The Mabin School**

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## Gerry Mabin



Call it the restlessness of a highly active mind. Or the curiosity of a lifelong learner. Or the social conscience of an activist. However you might describe what drives a changemaker,

Gerry Mabin calls it a dissatisfaction with the way things are.

“I don’t like to repeat the same lessons or have the same answers all the time. I like to add to things. I like to move things around—physically, mentally and socially. I’m always questioning what I think is the right way. Basically, we can always do things more efficiently and effectively. So why stop trying?”

From joining the Institute of Child Study at U of T in 1971 to starting The Mabin School in 1980, Gerry never stopped trying. An irony of her remarkable life path is that she has never been particularly focused on success.

“Of course we want to achieve our plans and dreams, but if you’re driven by the idea of being successful, you may not be willing to take risks. A preoccupation with

success can be inhibiting. I think we’re much better off if we’re like Mabin students, who find learning rewarding, are open to new ideas, focus on relationships and respect the individuality of others. Those are the drivers of change.”

As Gerry explains it, the original idea behind Mabin was to build on the energy and enthusiasm of children and their natural need to know, explore and be creative. It was also to focus on their emotional wellbeing and need for close social bonds.

Not surprisingly, Gerry’s newest initiative —Friendship in Action—runs on the same core beliefs. FIA is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to helping elementary school students develop greater emotional and social health. Working mostly in the Toronto District School Board, FIA helps students to feel connected, valued and safe in their classrooms so they will be better friends to each other and more confident learners. It also offers workshops for teachers and parents to share their concerns and develop strategies for supporting children.

“FIA is very unified in its understanding of what matters most in a child’s life,” explains Gerry. “So is Mabin. And I include Nancy when I say that. I couldn’t think of anyone more suited for Principal. She’s amazing at creating an environment in which both kids and adults want to explore and try new things. And she really connects to people and understands what they’re trying to achieve. Nancy’s style of leadership perfectly fits Mabin’s style of learning.”

Asked about the future of Mabin over the next five or ten years, Gerry replies, “I always believe change is necessary! Nothing can be held under glass. I think Mabin will take more of a leadership role in education. As the School continues to grow and change, it will act increasingly as a catalyst in education, inspiring other teachers and schools to be effective and empathetic changemakers. We need more of that in the world.”

“I love Ben Zander’s concept of the leader as a conductor who doesn’t actually make sound in the orchestra but coordinates and inspires everyone else in order to create an incredible piece of music.

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# Nancy Steinhauer



If you ask Nancy Steinhauer why she was drawn to the prospect of leading Mabin, the award-winning educator doesn’t hesitate: “When I imagine what a school ought to be,

I picture Mabin. Here, the students lead the learning. When you walk in, there are kids on the floor or gathered around tables. There is a relaxed feeling. It’s a place where you can really be yourself.”

Having pondered the idea of working at Mabin since she was a young teacher, Nancy’s long-time connection with the School’s founder was also part of the attraction. “Gerry has always been my idol,” Nancy says. “She embodies what education should be.”

The two educators have often talked about how much they have in common. “We like hearing people’s stories,” says Nancy. “And we are both problem solvers who are comfortable in roles where the focus is enabling others to learn and create.”

There is also agreement that Nancy’s unique perspective and novel contributions will be of value to the School. “When I took the job, Gerry and the Board really encouraged me to be me because that is the Mabin way,” recalls Nancy. “If I am authentic to my true self as an educator, I can give the most to this community.”

It is fitting that Nancy is arriving soon after Mabin was designated a Changemaker School, because social entrepreneurship and continual progress have been the hallmarks of her career. Consider two projects she led during her five-year tenure as Principal of George Webster Elementary School.

Nancy was a leader in the Model Schools for Inner Cities movement for the Toronto District School Board, and as a result, educators from around the world came to see the work that she and her staff were accomplishing. She was also the driving force behind one of the first school-based paediatric clinics in Toronto, drawing on her sophisticated relationship and project management skills. She worked tirelessly with provincial, municipal and local authorities and agencies, helped to raise \$75,000, and solved the various practical and financial problems that came up along the way. The end result? A clinic that serves over 1,300 children previously living without access to adequate resources. The clinic has been used as a model for seven others across the City.

These and a host of other initiatives led to Nancy being widely recognized for her leadership. She teaches aspiring administrators in the Ontario Principals’ Qualification Course and just finished a stint in the prestigious role of Student Achievement Officer with the Ministry of Education. She has also won an Outstanding Principal Award from The Learning Partnership and a Stand Up for Kids Award, sponsored by the four Children’s Aid Societies of Toronto.

For Nancy, the opportunity to lead Mabin is thrilling. “The School is evolving into a leading educational community. There is no place like this. It’s a dream come true for me to be here.”

**Quinn Simpson**  
Class of '96

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# Mabin: Creating Change- makers Since 1980

**T**he concept of “changemaking” runs deep in the souls of those who attended The Mabin School. Whether we graduated after eight years or were only present for a few, Mabin grabbed hold of our hearts and minds and shaped us into believing anything is possible, if we choose to pursue it.

Sometimes, I want to pin it on having a fearless leader like Gerry Mabin, always there to show us the meaning of courage and determination. Other times, it’s crystal clear that our teachers turned us into believers by making us feel special and loved. And it’s also quite likely that the endless choice during “Choosing Time” made a big impact.

But most of all, I want to pin it on *us*.

We were curious young minds who yearned to become independent thinkers

with passions, purpose and dreams. And we continue to be those people.

You should see us now. I am more proud of the people in my Mabin class than any other group I belong to. The diversity of careers, missions and pathways is profound. We made our own choices and decided what type of life we wanted for ourselves. When people told us it wasn’t possible, we never thought to listen. That’s how we have a class of changemakers living all over the world, from Australia to England to the west and east coasts of the United States. And of course, some have decided to make Canada their home.

Two great examples of changemakers from my class are Caitlin Cronenberg and Alan Gertner.

## ART THAT MOVES PEOPLE

Whilst Caitlin claims she never set out to accomplish one specific mission, she's certain that she wants to "create art that moves people and makes people feel something." After graduating from Ryerson with a degree in fashion design, Caitlin switched gears to pursue her passion for photography. You have probably seen some of her beautiful images on magazine covers or in layouts within publications like *Vogue Italia*. Recently, she shot the stunning cover art for Drake's new album, *Views*.

We know the power of imagery and how much it is growing with the visual demands of the 21st century. The beauty of Caitlin is her ability to provoke emotion and deep thought in the viewer. Her natural curiosity and thirst to do things differently have led her to publish one book — *Poser* — with a second on the way called *The Endings*.

With that internal motivation as well as inspiration from her son Wolfy, Caitlin hopes that one day, some of her images will be seen as iconic. She wants to inspire people in the same way she has been inspired by so many others. I think what Caitlin teaches me through her work more than anything is how changemaking can look different in different contexts.

## MOMENTS OF AWE

Alan Gertner is another changemaking character. He has a crystal clear mission "to prove cannabis can be beautiful" and to "savour time, have moments of awe and create special moments for others." A few years ago, he left his job as a Google executive, not fulfilled by corporate success. He has since been working on two exciting ventures.

First came his Time On Project (timeon.org), a journey committed to understanding life and discovering the intricate elements of happiness. Next, Alan co-founded Tokyo Smoke, a modern lifestyle brand that brings sophistication and design to coffee, clothing and most importantly, cannabis. Tokyo Smoke's flagship store is located in

downtown Toronto and sells coffee alongside cannabis paraphernalia and museum quality collectables. Its four strains of cannabis will be available soon in legal markets across the US and medically in Canada.

Curious about consumerism and how we spend our time, Alan is pushing the edges on all cylinders. The powerful sentiment he left me with about his drive was expressed in a few simple words: "I only get one chance." Isn't that the truth?

**W**e only get one chance in this life, and that's why I am on a mission to transform education. The goal is to shift the role of teacher to coach. My life's work is to help schools create an educational environment where children feel understood and loved by their teachers, able to be their most creative selves and dream big. Sound familiar?

Mabin was and continues to be empathetic and passionate about us as people. We were never made wrong. Mabin gave us insight into the world of leadership: how to



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solve our own problems, take ownership of our lives and show up, fully. It also taught us how to learn from people and join with them in partnerships.

My favourite author and now close friend, Seth Godin, has told me time and time again that we need the duality of "it might work" and "it might not work" to make change and thrive. There are few classes around the world that I can say with confidence know the meaning of that sentence more than the Mabin graduating class of 1996.

# On a Mission

The Mabin graduating class of 1996 believes anything is possible, and their varied missions across the globe prove they are right.

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## JEFF ROSS '94

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to bring the World Expo to Toronto in 2025. After spending the past four years in Europe on the city building and legacy planning associated with Olympic bids, Jeff is currently managing the Expo feasibility study.

## ASHLEY FRANSSSEN TINGLEY '96

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to help young people and their families dealing with addiction find the path to recovery and healing through counseling. After recently completing an Honours BA in Psychology, Ashley is now volunteering at CAMH.

## DAVID ROSEN '96

NEW YORK, USA

On a mission to create beautiful buildings that will help shape the New York City skyline. Working for a real estate developer in Manhattan, David also teaches real estate development at NYU.



## CAITLIN CRONENBERG '96

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to change what our eyes can see through photography you can feel in your body.

## CALLUM CAMPBELL '95

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to guide clients through the legal landscape so they can focus on making their businesses excel. A corporate/commercial lawyer, Callum previously practiced entertainment law and still works in the industry when the opportunity presents itself.

## CLAIRE MCKEE '96

GUILFORD, UK

On a mission to push the bounds of engineering capabilities, helping clients achieve their dream of creating iconic superyachts which are feats of both design and engineering. A Naval Architect, Claire is the technical consultant who works with artistic designers on the world's biggest yachts to turn sometimes outlandish inspirations into reality.

## JOSH ABLE '96

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to heal the minds and bodies of athletes. As a sport psychology consultant, Josh has helped athletes reach the Olympic Games, World and National Championships.

## JENNY CREED '96

SAN FRANCISCO, USA

On a mission to bring simplicity to self-care and gifting spa packages.

## PAUL COLE '96

SAN FRANCISCO, USA

On a mission as a product manager to make great apps for small businesses.

**JOHN GOLDIE '96**

HALIFAX, CANADA

On a mission to build and market new products that improve sports statistics and analytics.



**ALEX KANE '96**

CAIRNS, AUSTRALIA

On a mission to show the world the Great Barrier Reef before it's too late. Alex is Mabin's very own Australian Captain.

**QUINN SIMPSON '96**

NEW YORK, USA

On a mission to transform education by shifting the role of teacher to coach.

**JOANNA CREED '96**

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to help her family businesses thrive and stay as legal as possible!



**ALAN GERTNER '96**

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to make cannabis in Canada what wine is to France.

**JORDAN COHL '96**

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to keep learning while working as a CPA by day, doing primarily tax compliance work, and an MBA student, CrossFit doer and geriatric gymnastics participant by night.

**SOPHIE GREEN '94**

NEW YORK, USA

On a mission to intertwine the therapeutic nature of art and yoga into one space she calls "home."

**NICK WERNHAM '96**

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to create his second feature film, a dark comedy called *Business Ethics* based on a short film that he directed several years ago. A modern sermon about the dangers of deceit and greed, it approaches these themes with a wink and a smile rather than a wagging finger. Both the short and the feature were written by his father Richard.

**NIOMI CHERNEY '96**

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to create a third person window into perceptual experience by setting up heightened conditions for seeing, sensing and recording. Niomi's academic work in cultural theory and philosophy is deeply grounded by physical exploration and her background in contemporary dance.

**CAITLIN WALSH '94**

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to help crack the male stronghold in capital markets.

**CHASE BRISBIN '94**

LOS ANGELES, USA

On a mission to bring the richness of French food into the hearts and bellies of Californians with her new restaurant, Belle Vie. Chase also works in the entertainment industry distributing Lions Gate films and television across Canada and the US.



**NATALIE SACKS '96**

TORONTO, CANADA

On a mission to provide excellent small animal pet care in the role of Registered Veterinary Technician, Natalie is planning to obtain her specialty in the area of clinical pathology. She also writes short stories that will make you feel warm inside.

# Profiling Mabin Teachers...

## ALI JEFFERIES

Close to 25 years after Ali Jefferies taught Grade 3 and Grade 5 at Mabin from 1992-1995, the educator, author and mother of three still considers the School an integral part of her life. “My experience at Mabin has been a benchmark for assessing every other organization I have encountered. There is no place like it. People there are so invested in the School.”

Having taught in two other schools after Mabin before raising three children currently in the school system, Ali believes that Mabin graduates are different. “They don’t accept barriers because they understand that struggles are a part of learning and overcoming challenges. Every day, students can propose ideas that change the direction of the learning, so their curiosity and energy are limitless.”

Ali credits founder Gerry Mabin, with whom she team-taught Grade 3, as the catalyst for this remarkable approach. “Gerry was the ultimate changemaker. She was fearless when it came to considering ideas of value and trying new approaches. She pushed us all to think in new and creative ways and to instill those qualities in our students. The environment was never static.”

Today, Ali’s connection to Mabin extends beyond her direct work experience.

Her husband Lorenzo Cohen, who is the Director of the Integrative Medicine Program at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, is also the son of former Mabin art teacher Paola Cohen. Additionally, Ali’s niece is enrolled at the School.



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“I still feel like I am part of Mabin,” Ali observes, which is evident in her ongoing commitment to being a changemaker. Her most recent project has her collaborating on a book with Lorenzo that explores the link between lifestyle factors and cancer. Lorenzo is contributing the scientific research and Ali is illustrating how to make substantive and sustainable lifestyle changes that can reduce the risk of developing cancer and improve outcomes for those with cancer.

# ...Past & Present

## LISA GRASSA

Even before she became a teacher, Lisa Grassa was interested in the unique school on Poplar Plains Road. “I know several Mabin graduates. They have confidence in themselves and passionately follow what they love. They see things differently. Listening to them, Mabin seemed like a magical place. That really appealed to me.”

Now, as one of the many teachers who create this unique learning environment, Lisa has seen firsthand how the Mabin approach inspires those strengths in its graduates. “What I love about teaching here is that you can go with the students,” she says. “For us, teaching is about listening and responding, not telling. The students ask questions and those inquiries guide the learning.”

An apt example of this student-driven learning is the recent Kindergarten accessibility project. Following a visit from Nancy Barber, a woman living with microcephaly who uses a wheelchair, the School’s youngest students wanted to pursue the topic of accessibility. True to the Mabin approach, Lisa and SK teacher Laura Johnson followed the students’ lead and helped turn interest into action.

“We didn’t know where it would go,” says Lisa. “Fairness is a big issue for children this age. They felt strongly that it was too difficult and unsafe for Nancy to access buildings. They wanted to do something about it.”

The students noticed that many of the shops along Dupont Street near the School were not accessible. Their first thought was



to create permanent ramps, but after talking to shop owners, they realized how complex the issue is on city streets.

“Faced with the constraint, they just started problem solving,” recalls Lisa. “They said ‘the ramps don’t have to be out all the time. There can be a sign and you can call a number to have it put out.’ The children didn’t accept the barriers. They saw a way the world could be better and just kept going until they changed it.”

**LEARN MORE BY WATCHING AN INQUIRY ON ACCESSIBILITY, AT [YOUTU.BE/JZEBF\\_CBPLC](https://youtu.be/JZEBF_CBPLC)**



## **MANY OF OUR STUDENTS ARE HERE TODAY BECAUSE YOU WERE HERE YESTERDAY**

We feel privileged to be teaching the children of our alumni. We are thrilled each year when we realize that almost 100% of our applicants come to us through word of mouth.

We appreciate when you share your happy memories of your time at Mabin. Thanks for encouraging other wonderful families to visit us and learn what The Mabin School is all about.

While Kindergarten is our usual starting point, we occasionally have spots in other grades. For more information and to find out if we have a spot for the student in your life in September 2017, please contact Julie Binmore, Director of Admissions, at [julie@mabin.com](mailto:julie@mabin.com) or at 416.964.9594 ext. 247.



**The Mabin School**

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