

Profile in Giving

Marie Pani Switkes '61

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Marie Pani Switkes was graduated from the Riverdale School for Girls in 1961. After earning her BA from New York University, Marie married Daniel Switkes and together they raised three children. An involved parent since grammar school, Marie became an administrator at the arts-based school they attended, Walden School in Berkeley, CA, where she became the only non-teacher to become a fully functional collective member. During her time at Walden School Marie began developing her art skills, and is now a full-time artist specializing in photography and painting.

What has Riverdale meant to you over the past 50 years?

The love I felt for the school environment at Riverdale pointed me toward the 20-year involvement I developed with the teachers, parents, and students at Walden. In everything I did, the central theme of “nurturance” was paramount.

What teacher or class was most influential in shaping you and/or your career?

From the earliest years at the Neighborhood School, I felt the love and attention of many fine teachers. Classes were small enough to allow teachers to pay us individual attention and treat us as the varied individuals we were and still are. In second grade, Mrs. Pennington took me aside at lunchtime to teach me how to crochet because I'd asked her to; it's a skill I use to this day! Mrs. Tallarico provided a summer oil painting class, Mrs. Holstein was our homeroom teacher for Third Form, and Miss Class and Mrs. Rohrbach were huge influences on my future.

Why do you give to Riverdale?

Riverdale was my home-away-from-home. “In loco parentis” was extremely important for a child in a single parent home with no books! I sought and was provided the intellectual curiosity and the tools to use it well by my teachers at Riverdale. When I consider current students, and see their photos in QUAD, I feel so happy that they are receiving what I was given so long ago. I give consistently because I want to feel part of Riverdale's ongoing efforts to educate well-rounded youth who will delight in lifelong learning as well as becoming productive and caring world citizens. In my small way, I hope to keep supporting the school's genuinely important goals.



Fifty years after their graduation, four members of the Class of 1961 enjoyed reminiscing at a restaurant in Washington, DC (from left): Vivian Ronay, Harriet Hanger, Linda Donaldson, and Marie Pani Switkes.