



Several months ago, after returning from an out of town trip, I was pleasantly surprised by the thoughtfulness of colleagues who had done some spring cleaning and redecoration of my office while I was away. My favorite enhancement was Hebrews 13:8, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, beautifully etched near the ceiling of the north wall. Since its installation, the verse has been a reminder to me multiple times throughout the day of our loving and faithful Savior, a promise that has been particularly reassuring during this difficult time in the life of our school.

About two weeks after the explosion, I saw this photo of the etching, and while sadness engulfed me and tears began to flow, I felt a sense of peace as I was reminded once again that despite the devastation and heartache of August 2, the promise of Hebrews 13:8 still stands. The same Savior who was faithful before our tragic loss will be faithful after it.

The dependability of Jesus is the foundation of our hope and our model for perseverance. To know that Christ is our unchangeable and stable anchor in the midst of dark clouds, raging tides, and stormy seas gives us blessed assurance that He will never fail us, so we press on.

With confidence in our Lord and Savior, we will rebuild, grow stronger as a community, and enjoy a bright and blessed future. The brick and

mortar that lies in a heap of rubble at the Upper School site is not the heart of our school. The heart and soul of Minnehaha Academy that Ruth Berg and John Carlson embodied is our mission to provide high quality education integrating Christian faith and learning – it has been and will remain unchangeable! Our partnership with students and families remains steadfast and our committed faculty and staff will continue to build upon our reputation of excellence.

Thank you for the thoughts, prayers, notes, and gifts sent our way as we have navigated these uncharted waters. The outpouring of love and support from all over the world has carried us. Join us in thanking and giving glory to God for the miraculous work He has done and will continue to do through us.

... And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast, 1 Peter 5:10.



Donna M. Harris

COMMUNITY GROWS HERE:

#TogetherWeRise

August 2, 2017, began as a typical summer day at Minnehaha Academy's Upper School. Meetings were taking place throughout the building and details were being ironed out for the upcoming school year. A few students were practicing in the gym, some were on a training run, while others were out playing in the soccer field behind the school.

There was also some work going on inside the building – a gas meter was to be moved from the boiler room to the exterior of the building. Something went wrong that morning, and that's when things turned from a typical summer day to one that many won't forget.

A natural gas explosion at 10:23 a.m. destroyed the center portion of the Upper School - the main stairwell, classrooms, parts of the library, and business office. It was an explosion that shook the entire building, and it shocked thousands of people who have known, loved, and called Minnehaha home.

IT WAS A DARK DAY IN THE HISTORY OF MINNEHAHA ACADEMY.

As the morning turned into afternoon and then to evening, details slowly emerged. Emergency personnel were searching for survivors, securing the area and getting statements from witnesses. Members of the media were reporting live.

During this difficult time, however, there were glimpses of goodness. Neighbors, students, teachers, parents, and alumni all showed up to cry and to offer prayers and support.

Tents were set up for shade, neighbors brought water, food arrived. Homes and businesses were opened for those who needed a break. Emergency responders showed compassion and worked tirelessly.

Hours later, we learned that we lost two precious people in the blast: John Carlson and Ruth Berg. Two other employees had significant injuries. Several were taken to the hospital. It was a long day.

A prayer service was planned for that night and hundreds showed up to show support - to pray together, sing together, and cry together. It was a renewed affirmation that God is in control, and that He would pull the Minnehaha community through this difficult time.



"Tonight is an example of the kind of caring community we are."

Dr. Donna Harris

"Tonight is an example of the kind of caring community we are," said President Dr. Donna Harris. Although she was injured in the explosion, she attended the service and encouraged others. "We're going to get through it," she said. "We trust God. He is going to do phenomenal work."

People went home and tried to process the day. They prayed for the school community. They prayed for the families in extreme grief. They prayed for those who were injured and suffering.

The next day shifted to answering the question "what now?" While the

National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) began its formal investigation, the leadership at Minnehaha Academy started to work on the future of the school. It was just three weeks before school was scheduled to start.

People were emotionally exhausted, some were physically injured, and then there were logistical challenges - offices were gone; no one had their equipment or files to actually do the big job of planning for the school's future. But they pressed on.

A war room of sorts was set up at the Lower & Middle School, tactical teams were developed to utilize the expertise of alums and parents, and people got to work. How were they going to find a new site for 400 students and teachers, and be ready to start school in a few weeks? When could they be ready? What would happen to the old site? For those first few days people worked around the clock to figure out the answers to these and many other questions.

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Dr. Donna Harris

"Our school year will be different, that is for sure," said Harris. "But we are going to come together and make powerful memories together and lean on each other to get through this. Minnehaha has a large, proud, powerful community across this country, and all of that community will be praying for us, supporting us, and cheering us on."

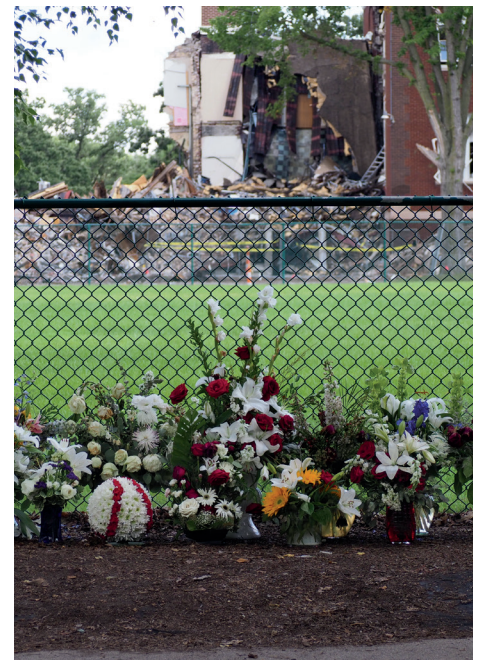
During all this, time was set aside to honor those who lost their lives.

John Carlson's life was celebrated at a service on August 6, 2017. His service was filled with sweet stories of this man who loved his family dearly, who was kind to everyone, who enjoyed sharing Dilly Bars, and who loved Minnehaha Academy. And then a week later people gathered again, this time to celebrate Ruth Berg. She too, was honored with a service that included her favorite music, photos brought in by friends, and memories from those who knew and loved her. The chapel was overflowing with people who came to these services to remember John and Ruth (see page 10 for more on John and Ruth).

#TogetherWeRise

As plans were being made for the school year, people near and far offered to help in a variety of ways. They brought food and coffee for those who needed nourishment. Strangers offered prayers. Neighbor kids donated money from their piggy-banks. So many people wanted to help - it was heartwarming!

Students made memorials near the explosion site. Posters, flowers, and



ribbons represented the loss of life and the love people had for each other and their school. Hugs and tears were shared freely.

Something pretty special started brewing amongst parents and students - ideas to more formally bring people together and hopefully shift gears from grieving to planning for the future. The Unity Walk was planned for August 15 and from that, the slogan #TogetherWeRise began.

Over a thousand people showed up wearing red on the Upper School lawn to thank emergency responders, share a beautiful hymn and pray together. And then we walked together from the Upper School to the Lower & Middle School where the flag, that had since the explosion been at half staff, was raised once again to symbolize a new beginning. There was music and food and fellowship - it was such an uplifting evening (see page 8).

MAKING REAL PROGRESS

The Lower & Middle School, which was the new home for all the staff who were displaced, was a busy place as summer was coming to an end for teachers and faculty. The new school year kicked off with a moving worship service together - it was such an important time to be together to grieve some more, share, give thanks, and then plan for a new year.

The Lower & Middle School was a joyous place to be on August 23 when students PreK-grade 8 walked through the doors. The sounds of children in the building were so welcomed - this bit of normalcy was a blessing.

That same night the Mendota Heights City Council approved the new site for the Upper School. The new site was met with excitement and relief - as plans for the new year could really move forward.

"Minnehaha's Got Heart" was another special event timed perfectly with the announcement of a new, temporary site. It allowed students, faculty, and alumni to celebrate by sharing their talents in a moving tribute to their school. Planned by parents, it was a night that included a powerful poem, great humor, meaningful lyrics, solo and group performances by students

and adults. "I had a hard time finding focus for my own remarks, but the evening provided a number of reminders of why I feel so blessed to be a part of the MA community," said Jason Wenschlag, Upper School principal.

GETTING THE STUDENTS READY

Plans for the school year were quickly coming together. September 5 would be the new start date at the temporary location. Renovations were feverishly underway to make that space ready for the students. But until the space was ready, students had a little prep work to do. A gathering was set for Upper School students so they could see their advisory groups, get their schedules, and connect with teachers to get a jump start on some homework. It was so good to be together again!

Seniors then met to discuss their hopes for the year. Although the loss of the building and life was hard for everyone, it may have been hardest on these students, whose plans for their senior year of high school were drastically changed. And yet, they are a resilient bunch. Although it'll be a different year than they had planned for, they are determined to make it extra special.

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"I want all students to know that our goal is to maintain all of our traditions and normal events - even if they look different."

Jason Wenschlag





and normal events - even if they look different," said Jason Wenschlag. "We are going to have a back-to-school dance, homecoming activities, and all the other fun things we do. We may have to make adjustments, but we are going to make it a special year."

After two weeks of around-the-clock work by contractors, painters, carpet-layers, technicians, and volunteers, classrooms were just about ready. Students and staff were able to 'pay it forward' to the workers, bringing them treats and a banner (which was hung in their break room) as a small gesture of their thanks.

Labor Day weekend was truly a weekend of labor for many Minnehaha faculty, staff, and parent volunteers. Boxes were moved and unpacked, and furniture was assembled in the new facility. Last minute projects were completed. "God has been doing some serious moving in this project!" said Wenschlag. Things were actually ready for the students to start back to school (see page 9).

While working at the new site people paused briefly on September 2 at 10:00 am, the one-month mark after the explosion, to pray together and be encouraged to continue doing the great work that was going on.

SPECIAL, NO DOUBT.

After a final prayer service and dedication of the new space on September 4, school started on September 5, with a joyous ribbon cutting by this year's senior class. Time was spent getting familiar with the building and finding various classrooms. Then at Assembly it was a time to publicly acknowledge gratefulness for all the people who helped make this day possible.

There aren't enough words to express thanks to all who helped us through these turbulent weeks. It is a testament to the foundation on which this school was started.

Thank you James Nash ('60) for sharing photos for this article.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

Throughout this tragedy we have been reminded of many blessings.

It was a quiet summer day at the school; no students were seriously injured
 Many employees risked their lives to help others
 Individuals and businesses from all over have come to help and give support
 Minnehaha's caring community has been shown to others through massive media coverage

A temporary location was found and renovated in miraculous time

Minnehaha is financially stable
 Our students and families have been incredibly loyal

So many prayers have been answered!

Seeing what God has done over the past month has strengthened the faith of many

Patrick Gibbons and Bryan Duffey, both who were hospitalized after the explosion, continue to recover from their injuries

From Patrick: "I am appreciative of the outpouring of kindness that has been showered upon my family since August 2nd. The MA community, employees, parents, and students have been remarkably supportive in this difficult time."

Bryan and his wife Jamie have also expressed their thanks for all the support. Bryan's recovery can be followed at: www.caringbridge.org/visit/bryanduffey

UNITY WALK

More than 1,000 people came together at Minnehaha Academy for a Unity Walk. It was a time “to come together, to pause, to remember, to call on the Lord, and to look forward together,” said President Dr. Donna Harris.

“We remember John and Ruth and the joy they brought to our community, we pray for the walking wounded among us who still bear the trauma of this event,” said Dr. Harris. “Thank you for this community that is surrounding us with your love.” She also thanked many staff members who ran to alert others moments before the building exploded.

The night ended with the raising of the American Flag outside Minnehaha’s Lower & Middle School. “Gathering today to lock hands and hearts is the healing balm we need,” said Dr. Harris. “TogetherWeRise.”



MINNEHAHA ACADEMY'S MENDOTA CAMPUS



In just two weeks, contractors and volunteers transformed the now-closed Brown Institute in Mendota Heights into the new temporary site for Upper School students. Principal Jason Wenschlag said, "the fire marshal came here the other day and approved things, and as he was walking out he said, 'I have never seen anything like this in my career, a building transformation in 2 weeks and I probably never will.'"

Scores of volunteers spent Labor Day weekend helping assemble and organize 900 pieces of furniture for students and teachers. "I think it's a testament to this community. People are wanting to rally for Minnehaha Academy, from the contractors, to parents to students," marveled Wenschlag. "The attitudes and hearts and minds are so committed to making this happen." The site is located at 1345 Mendota Heights Road, Mendota Heights, MN 55120.



Thank you Mortenson Construction, the architectural firm ATS&R, and all the sub-contractors who did an enormous amount of work to get Minnehaha Academy students back to class on September 5!

Thank you Kory Kevin Studio, Kory Reckinger, for sharing photos for this article.

REMEMBERING JOHN AND RUTH

We are saddened by the loss of John and Ruth who now reside in their heavenly home. What a Christ-like gift they were to our school. John's love for Minnehaha was apparent in any interaction one would have with him. He took on his role as ambassador, chief Minnehaha storyteller, burden lifter, and lover of people to heart. We will miss the joy he brought daily to his work at Minnehaha. Ruth was the epitome of kindness and grace. She was always warm and pleasant; her welcoming smile, ready willingness to support and help others, and charming sense of humor will be missed.

Dr. Donna Harris



John Carlson loved just about everyone he met. He was always kind and he gave his best work every day. He couldn't wait to show people around his beloved Minnehaha Academy. Most now know he had a thing for Dilly Bars – he kept a stash of them and shared them with students and faculty alike, in hopes of brightening their day.

He left his mark on many students, neighbors, family, and friends. The day after John passed away, a barista at a nearby Caribou commented that John was like a grandpa to her. He may not have even known that, but she felt his loss deeply.

Jane Anfang, Director of Alumni Relations, worked with him often, as he was the 1953 Class Rep. He could often be found in her office, tossing out ideas or talking about how to get more people involved. "He was often thinking about his classmates and how to reconnect them to Minnehaha," she said. "He was already thinking about their 65th reunion (in 2018). He wanted it to be their best one yet. He will be missed!"

John is survived by his wife and best friend, Barbara Carlson; children, Lynnda (James) Nelson, Beth Ann (Dennis) Morgan, Kayla/Lisa Carlson and James (Himanee) Gupta-Carlson; grandchildren, Alyssa, Alex, Megan, Kjersten, Zachary (Amber) and Cody; great-granddaughters, Machayla and Bailey Morgan. His service was, as requested, at Minnehaha Academy Lower & Middle School. As was stated in his obituary, "He died in a place he loved."

If you called Minnehaha Academy during the day, you likely spoke to **Ruth Berg**. Ruth worked for 17 years as the switchboard operator at the Upper School, and she always greeted people in a friendly way.

The Publicity Student Interns had daily interactions with Ruth and she was remembered fondly by Erin Mortenson ('13). "She was the first person we interacted with before doing the announcements, and she always greeted us warmly and with a smile," she said. "She would happily answer any question we had, no matter how many times we had asked it before...she laughed at our jokes and the 'Snapple fun facts' we shared each afternoon. We knew we could count on her!"

Nancy Ann Yaeger worked with Ruth every day and they were good friends. "Ruth was a gentle presence in the midst of the whirlwind at the switchboard and President's reception area," she said. Nancy said she is best described by the 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 passage that describes love:

"Ruth was patient and kind. Ruth was not jealous, she did not brag, and was not proud. Ruth was not rude, was not selfish, and did not get upset with others. Ruth did not count up wrongs that have been done. Ruth took no pleasure in evil but rejoiced over the truth. Ruth patiently accepted all things. Ruth always trusted, always hoped, and (will) always endure (in our hearts)."

Ruth was preceded in death by her father, LeRoy Berg. Survived by daughter, Brittany Bergstrom; fiancée, Mark Burrington; mother, JoAnn Fricano; siblings, Sherrie Winkler, Rick Fricano (Pam), and Joe Fricano; niece, Stephanie (Ben); nephews, Derek (Jordan) and Levi; and great-niece, Sophia. A service was held August 13, 2017, at Minnehaha Academy.





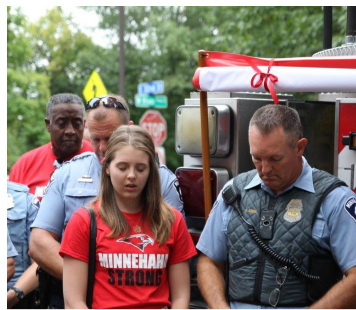
#TogetherWeRise

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stronger future for generations to come.

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