Before 2013, Olivier Ndorimana, Michee Muhumbo and Chantal Nizigiyimana had never left their home country of Burundi, Africa. They’d never been on a plane and all they knew of the United States was what they saw in the movies. But thanks to Burundi High School Students in USA (BHSUSA), all three students will graduate from Lourdes Academy in May.

BHSUSA was initiated by Egide Nimubona and approved by the Board of Directors of the Burundi Education Fund, Inc. to provide Burundian students the opportunity to advance their education by attending an American high school, learning Catholic values and developing their leadership skills. Burundi, one of the poorest and hungriest countries in the world, has experienced recurring civil wars that left hundreds of thousands dead. Nimubona fled Burundi in 1994 and became a refugee in Canada and later moved to Wisconsin to take a position as a mechanical engineering instructor at Fox Valley Technical College. The atrocities he experienced in Burundi are etched in his heart. His belief is that education is the only way to lift the country out from the poverty and civil unrest that has plagued it for decades.

“While it is not possible to bring miracles overnight to a society that is at least two decades behind the western technological civiliza-
tion, this program plants the seeds of hope by exposing a few Burundian students to the American values where capitalism, faith and generosity have lifted the lives of millions at home and around the world,” Nimubona said.

The students completed a rigorous application process to participate in the program based on their academic performance, Catholic values and leadership abilities. Once here, they were placed with host families for a year at a time. Ndorimana and Nizigiyimana attended Lourdes on full scholarships since their parents are subsistence farmers with no income. So far, the experience has exceeded their expectations.

“In our school community we’ve been treated well,” Ndorimana said. “Lourdes is a nice environment. Being taken into a family and becoming part of them takes away from missing your family.”

Ndorimana and Muhumbo were selected to come to the United States in 2013 with Nizigiyimana coming in 2014. Being selected for the program is an honor. Participants represent their country and plan to use what they’ve learned to help rebuild Burundi.

The students recognize the opportunity they’ve been given and are paying that experience forward with generous hearts. They have served in homeless shelters, food pantries and in their schools and parishes.

“We know what it is like to be treated well and helped, and we should help others who may be in need like us,” Ndorimana said. “We have to pay it forward. I might not be able to help the families who helped me, but I can help others.”

The trio will graduate in May at the top of their class with a host of exciting experiences under their belt. All three were involved in athletics with Ndorimana and Nizigiyimana also participating in the school musical.

They’ve ventured beyond the borders of Burundi and Wisconsin traveling to destinations like New York, Disney World, Tennessee and Chicago. Muhumbo even had a chance to meet Mickey Mouse, and Ndorimana became the first person in his family to downhill ski.

“My experience has been awesome,” Muhumbo said. “Most people want to travel the world, but we got to do it when we were 18 years old.”

With graduation around the corner, Ndorimana, Nizigiyimana and Muhumbo are faced with challenging decisions. They all dream of attending college but some lack the resources. They long to see their families, but political instability in Burundi has caused violence and protests that threaten to keep them from returning home for the summer. Amidst the challenges, they remain steadfast in hope and prayer.

Muhumbo plans to pursue an engineering degree at the University of Wisconsin Platteville. He wants to stay in the United States and work to build more high schools in Burundi to give students there an opportunity to continue their education.

Nizigiyimana is interested in studying engineering, actuarial science or accounting, and wants to help her family to make sure her younger siblings receive an education.

Ndorimana, who is discerning the priesthood, wishes to study psychology, math and theology/philosophy, but has not decided on a college.

Since they lack the means to attend college, Ndorimana and Nizigiyimana plan to take a year off to serve the poor in hopes BHSUSA can find donors to sponsor their post-secondary education dreams.

The generous supporters of BHSUSA have made it possible for three young students filled with faith, passion, courage and determination to change their destiny, to escape the cycle of poverty that grips their country and learn how they can use their experiences to better their community, their country and the world.

“This is a chance I got. I never thought it could happen to me,” Nizigiyimana said. “It’s important to remember that I got a chance to be better so I can help other people have that chance.”

To learn more about BHSUSA, contact Egide Nimubona at 920-540-7486 or enimubona@educateburundi.org or Nancy Jodarski at 920-810-3216 or nancyjodarski@att.net.
From coast to coast, Lourdes Academy alumni are lighting up the world with their contributions to the arts. Whether on the stage or behind the camera, alumni are making their mark in the arts.

Liz Semenas: From Lourdes Academy to Los Angeles

Liz Semenas is working as a production assistant at Disney-ABC Television in Los Angeles.

By Sara Weber (‘16) - Knight Writer Student Journalist

2009 alumna Liz Semenas is taking Los Angeles’ entertainment industry by storm and is showing everyone what a little Lourdes power can do.

Semenas has had a creative mind her whole life, and she said she knew by high school that the entertainment industry was ultimately where she wanted to end up. According to Semenas, as a child, she was always making videos or creating stories to make people laugh. When she wasn’t creating stories, she was reading them. She says she has always enjoyed reading due to the ability it gives a person to escape into new universes.

“As I grew older, I started watching more television and, just as I did with books, I escaped. I entered new worlds and had emotional connections with the characters. At some point in my high school career, I dreamed of a job in television,” Semenas said.

Semenas feels very blessed to have gotten the opportunity to go to Lourdes because she always felt encouraged to express her creative side and explore her interests. For example, she said Lourdes provided her with a camera and editing system for her to make a video for fun that involved parts of the student body.

“I am very blessed that I was able to attend Lourdes. I had opportunities to grow, and I had some of the greatest staff members who always encouraged and believed in me,” Semenas said.

After graduating Lourdes in 2009, Semenas continued her education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. She graduated from UWO in December of 2013 and, shortly after, moved to California to pursue her career. Her first job post-college was on a show called Amazing America with Sarah Palin where she worked as an assistant camera operator and had the opportunity to travel around the country. Since then, she has worked on shows ranging from Airplane Repo to Teen Mom.

Semenas is currently living in Los Angeles, California, and works as a production assistant at Disney-ABC Television in entertainment marketing where she is the associate producer. Aside from that, she is also working on a short film called Framed - The Adventures of Zion Man.

She says her favorite aspect of working in the entertainment industry is learning from and working with passionate, creative, and accomplished people.

“One of the coolest things has been working with the cast members of some of my favorite TV shows. I have loved Scandal since it premiered when I was in college, and to work with the cast on projects for the show has been surreal,” Semenas said.

Semenas is excited for what’s to come in her future in Los Angeles and is proud of what she has already accomplished. She says one of her main goals for the future is to help create a television show that makes people laugh.

The Lourdes Academy family is proud to have a hard working, humorous alumna like Liz Semenas and is excited to see what creative projects she will complete in upcoming years!

Inspirations in Athletics

The Summer 2016 issue of The Shield will feature inspirational stories of Lourdes alumni involved in athletics (players or coaches, college, post-college, or professional).

Don’t be shy. It’s your time to shine. Tell us about your athletic experiences (or those of someone you know) to be included in The Shield. To share your story, contact Karen Boehm by May 1 at 920-426-3626, ext. 546 or kboehm@lourdesacademyoshkosh.org.
Chris Meidl: Shepherding Artists

By Jordan Mundinger (‘18) - Knight Writer Student Journalist

When Christopher Meidl (’79) was only in middle school, he felt a strong draw to the arts. He participated in band, choir, and theater in whatever form. Meidl said he played Santa in a middle school play and “it was just miserable” because his dad attached the cotton beard with spray on adhesive. Regardless, he enjoyed it, and he continued to participate in the arts.

At Lourdes, Meidl was involved in musical theater, choir, swing choir, and one-act plays, all of which helped nurture his eventual career direction. Meidl said that he was greatly influenced by longtime Lourdes choir director, Judy Kuble. “She was our Lourdes mom,” Meidl said. He added that she had so much passion and energy for her work and her students it was contagious. On a personal and emotional level, he went on to say, “Mixed chorus was, for many of us, a safe place at the end of the day where we could both enjoy school and be challenged.”

After graduating from Lourdes in 1979 and going on to college and law school, Meidl practiced law for seven years but left to help build and run a record label. Meidl said, “in the end, the overall experience demonstrated the classic case of big record label crushes the little guy. I loved it and the people I worked with, though.”

After TommyBoy Records did them in, he took a job as executive director of a public policy non-profit, spending equal time in Chicago and Washington, DC. Living in Wheaton, IL, he and his wife became connected with a community church where he met Phil and Lisa Vischer, creators of Big Idea’s VeggieTales. Meidl was familiar with VeggieTales, and as he talked to Vischer about the company and his visions for it, Vischer invited him to be a part of the team.

From 1998 to 2002, Meidl was as an executive with Big Idea where he handled the business affairs and marketing department and managed the animation and design studios for the company.

“It was an intense and heady time as the company grew in size and notoriety. My favorite aspect was managing, encouraging and supporting the large team of artists. It was a wonderful experience with great highs and significant lows,” Meidl said.

Meidl said he now works as an independent arts representative where his goal is to help his clients expand their brand, make the impact their work deserves and, of course, make a comfortable living through the craft they love. Meidl said he doesn’t consider himself a typical agent but “their promoter, mouthpiece, business manager, counselor, friend, and shepherd, of sorts.” Meidl summed up his career by saying he “loves artists as some of the most unique and critical members of society,” quickly adding, “though it can be like herding cats.”

Meidl said he likes potential clients to be unique and emotionally engaged in their work. “At the very beginning, I need to love an artist’s work or I don’t feel like I represent them with any integrity.” He added that he almost always comes in contact with a client’s work in a gallery, book store, on stage or through referrals. “I often own work by the artist before I decide to work with them,” he says.

Meidl is currently working on his master’s degree in counseling which he says helps him relate to the artists he represents.

“I deeply care about my clients and am compelled to understand the complexities of their work, as well as their inner world,” he said. “It is make-up to talk to people below the surface and the additional education merely enhances that.”

One of the artists Meidl currently represents is Penny Felts who specializes in Polaroid photography. According to Meidl, he first saw Felts’ work at an art show. “I was drawn to it and wanted to buy several pieces,” Meidl said. When he met her to pick up the photos, she asked, “So what’s this artist’s rep thing you do?” He has been working with her since.

Felts recently was among ten photographers selected in an international photography contest which Meidl insisted she enter, against her will. Meidl’s goal for Felts is to see her photography in multiple galleries and, eventually, licensed to hotel chains and major urban developers.

Meidl said if he could go back and do anything differently, it would be increasing his personal involvement in the arts. He added that his wife often encourages him to answer local theater calls, but he’s yet to do as she says.

Meidl encourages young artist to “find someone who believes in them and be around that person as much as possible. Also, be open to honest criticism about how to grow in your art so you have a realistic perspective of the potential for commercial success, if that’s what you want.”

Supporting Lourdes is just a phone call away

Lourdes students and alumni will be reaching out to fellow alumni in April during the Spring Phone-a-Thon. Please consider supporting Lourdes by welcoming their call and pledging a gift to the Spring Appeal. If this is your first gift, considering giving your class year. (ie: Class of 1980 = $19.80). Your support is appreciated.
By Paul Lee ('17) - Knight Writer Student Journalist

Jens Rasmussen, alumnus of the class of 1988, has embarked on an artful journey after graduating from Lourdes Academy.

Rasmussen currently works in theatre and film, primarily as an actor in New York, but says he views himself as a storyteller.

Rasmussen will use his storytelling skills in the near future as he is scheduled to appear in a new TV series due to come out this spring. Also, this summer, he will be originating a role in a world premiere of an Off-Broadway play called *Seen / By Everyone*.

Rasmussen said one of his most important achievements in the arts, however, is being involved with the Bechdel Project which he founded with two colleagues. The Bechdel Project is a non-profit company dedicated to telling stories on stage and screen that pass the Bechdel Test, Rasmussen said.

The Bechdel Test is a way to gauge gender equality in narratives. Rasmussen explained that a story is said to pass the Bechdel Test if there are at least two female characters who talk to each other about something other than a man. Rasmussen said unfortunately many stories do not meet these criteria.

According to Rasmussen, “Currently, women are underrepresented in stories. The stories we ingest affect the way we see the world and ourselves in that world, and changing those stories is a way to change the world.”

Rasmussen said that changing stories to more fully and accurately represent women is important to him because he feels society is richest and works the best when the full diversity of humans’ experiences are represented and “given a seat at the table.”

Rasmussen said, “The response to the Bechdel Project and its mission has been absolutely astounding because though we just started the company this fall, we’ve already been invited to participate in some major national and international festivals.”

In addition to the Bechdel Project, Rasmussen has also been involved with the creation of numerous companies and programs over the course of his career. He was the founding director of the No Shame Columbus, the founding producer of “The Last of the Mohicans Outdoor Drama,” co-founder of Assembly Productions and Strike Anywhere Improvisational Theater, and a founding board member of SOAR, an artist-in-residence program for area schools in Oshkosh.

Rasmussen said his unique life experiences have also shaped him as a person; he has lived in Denmark and has hitchhiked across Europe. He said he has also studied with some of the most “brilliant theatre makers” in the world and lived through 9/11 in New York City. However, he said that his most challenging and profound experience, thus far, has been being a part of a television show that is set to air this spring.

Reflecting back to his time as a Knight, Rasmussen said he fondly remembers Lourdes as his home. Two of his most vivid memories were his great teachers and the first group of friends with whom he really connected.

According to Rasmussen, Lourdes Academy prepared him well, and after graduation he quickly realized the quality of his education was much better than most.

“Lourdes was incredible for me and my development but, honestly, I don’t miss it,” he said. “I hope none of the current students will either.”

Rasmussen says he believes Lourdes Academy doesn’t want its graduates to think back on their high school years as their “best and brightest” because they have so much to achieve and accomplish in their futures.

“I hope Lourdes is, and continues to be, a school that prepares students for experiences they can’t yet imagine and adventures they couldn’t dream of.”

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Continuing the Tradition

The third generation is in the house. Welcome past and future Knights. Back row: Jenny (Boyce ‘98) & Larry Mroczkowski, Dan and Robin (Boyce ‘95) Washkoviak (Janesville). Seated center: Barb (Brown) and Gary Boyce (69). Children from left: Tessa (27), Abigail (29), Larry (33) and Emma (30) Mroczkowski; Noelle and Reid Washkoviak.
UPCOMING LOURDES REUNIONS

Class of 1966 - 50 Year Reunion/Sock Hop
Saturday, September 10
Lourdes High School Gym, 110 N. Sawyer St.
Contact: Joan Schneider at muggs48@yahoo.com

Class of 1969 - Medicare Party
Saturday, July 9 • 5-10 p.m.
Robbins Supper Club, 1810 Omro Rd.
Contact: Jim Smith at smithdad81@gmail.com

Class of 1976 - 40 Year Reunion
Saturday, June 4
Lourdes High School Commons, 110 N. Sawyer St.
Contact: Therese Meidl at peaceandtall@solarus.net

Class of 1986 - 30 Year Reunion
Saturday, August 13
Elks Club - Oshkosh, 175 W. Fernau Ave.
Contact: Vickie Kempinger at 920-410-5155 or thisismyemail@new.rr.com

Class of 2006 - 10 Year Reunion
Date and Location TBD
Contact: Michael Frohrib at mforhrib@badgerliquor.com

Watch the Alumni link at lourdesacademyoshkosh.org for reunion details and updates.

Please stay in touch
To continue receiving The Shield and other exciting news from Lourdes Academy, please update your information online (address, phone and email). This information is used to generate lists for class reunions and other events.

Visit lourdesacademyoshkosh.org and click on the Alumni shield to update your information.

Planning a reunion? Contact Shannon Gibson at 920-426-3626, ext. 541 or sgibson@lourdesacademyoshkosh.org for assistance. Lourdes Academy offers free mailing lists and facilities usage for Lourdes class reunions.