

Brigitte Kyle

FACULTY FOCUS By Anita Palmer

Sharing her French heritage while promoting cultural exchange

A few years ago, students from The Bishop's School were touring the Museum of the French Revolution outside Grenoble, France. Something made them yell for their guide, Brigitte Kyle.

"They were so excited," says Brigitte, a longtime French teacher at Bishop's. "We had been reading Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, and the edition had a painting of leaders of the Revolution on its cover. There in the museum was the original painting. They were in awe."

For Brigitte, now in her 20th year at Bishop's, that scene illustrates the value of the French exchange program she has built over the last 12 years. Every year Brigitte spends endless hours arranging for a group of 20 or so teenagers from Grenoble to visit for two weeks in the fall. Then a similar number of Bishop's students heads to France for two weeks in the spring.

"It's amazing how the linguistic skills can progress in two weeks," says Brigitte. "And being there makes the language so much more relevant, especially when the students are relating to someone their own age. But for me, much more important, is the exchange of culture."

Paris-born, petite and graceful (she studied ballet for eight years), Brigitte is something of a dynamo when it comes to promoting cross-cultural opportunities. Though it is an official School endeavor, the exchange program is driven and supported mainly by Brigitte, the students in the French program, and their parents. Brigitte wishes an international exchange program could be instituted School-wide during an extended spring break. But for now she is focusing on keeping her costs reasonable and raising funds for scholarship students who want to participate. (Hence the



weekly bake sales!)

"She is passionate about fostering cultural contacts between people. She really puts her heart and soul into this," says Mary Jane Sutherland, chair of the foreign language department. "She lives and breathes the language. She also wants to share the American experience. And perhaps most importantly, she encourages students to leave their own cultural boundaries and experience the world."

Brigitte's own boundaries were expanded by an exchange program. Actually, the process really starts further back. One might say that Brigitte ended up at Bishop's thanks in part to her father's love of American TV westerns.

"I was always fascinated by the West," says Brigitte. "My father was very much into westerns, and I was always watching them with him."

So when, as a graduate student at the Sorbonne University, Brigitte heard about a one-year exchange program in the United States, it didn't take her long to decide to participate. She couldn't choose the city or university but she could pick the region. She was sent to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

After Brigitte returned to Paris, the university invited her back to teach. Her adventurous decision to accept led to a Texan for a husband (Frank Kyle), an expanded interest in American literature and culture, and a decade as a university instructor before joining the faculty at Bishop's in 1985.

Brigitte's colleagues describe her as an energetic behind-the-scenes sort of person who can handle just about anything. "She is so capable. Everything she does requires hard work but she never shows



If it's spring, it must be Paris...Brigitte sorts through another cross-cultural adventure—and her students' luggage.

it," says Joan Black, dean of faculty. "There's a calmness about her and a competence that I admire."

Colleague Suzanne Federico, who teaches Spanish, has twice accompanied the exchange trip. She knows firsthand the complexities Brigitte must tackle to make the program work. At the end of a recent exchange trip, Suzanne

"was touched by the students' heartfelt expressions of gratitude to us, especially to Brigitte. They know how incredibly hard she works to make this a rich, and in some cases, life-changing experience for them."

Senior Maria Fernandez, this year's French Club president, described the exchange trip as "the high point of all of my Bishop's experience."

She loved living with her French family. "We had dinner with them every night—so we had to answer their questions, like what we did that day and what we thought of it." Her sister, Mariana Fernandez '03, had participated a few years before, so Maria knew a little of what to expect.

Maria plans to continue studying French literature and culture in college—

something many of Brigitte's students have gone on to do. That includes Brigitte's daughter, Kalleen, who graduated from Bishop's in 2000 and spent a "gap year" in Paris as an *au pair* before finishing a program there run by the University of London.

Between trips, Brigitte teaches all levels of French, as well as Business French and the French Cinema—two courses she created. She sponsors the French Club and the French Honor Society, and helps develop events for French Culture Week.

"I am a sociable person. I like people, especially young people," says Brigitte. "Seeing them grow is rewarding."

And sharing her love of language and cultural exchange is her gift in return.

Welcome New Faculty!

Ronald Larocca, *Science*

B.A., Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY
M.A., California State University at Fresno
Ron began teaching in 1965 in New York, moved to California in 2001, and came out of retirement to take a full-time position at Bishop's this year.

Suzanne Mathews, *Counselor*

B.A., University of California, Berkeley
M.A., Ph.D., California School of Professional Psychology, San Diego
Suzanne enjoys yoga, reading, and spending time with her 14-year-old twin daughters.

Dee Mecham, *History & Social Sciences*

B.A., B.S., University of Utah
M.A., University of Hawaii
Dee brings the aloha spirit to Bishop's after teaching and coaching basketball at the Kamehameha Schools in Hawaii.

Marcus Milling, *Science Department Chair*

B.S., Texas A & M University
M.S., University of Wisconsin
Marcus taught physics in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco, the coldest place in Africa.

Michael Rybak, *Mathematics*

B.S., Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Michael is a newlywed and comes to Bishop's from the Grauer School in Encinitas.

Andy Shamel '01, *Chaplain Intern*

B.A., Dartmouth
SEE STORY IN THE BUZZ.

Melissa Sharp, *Science*

B.S., University of Buffalo
M.Ed., Lesley University
Melissa comes to Bishop's from the Webb School in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Elizabeth Wepsic, *Visual Arts*

B.A., Art Institute of Chicago
M.A., National University
Elizabeth speaks four languages, grew up in a household without television, and enjoys writing poetry, traveling, gardening, and yoga.

—Lee Neuwirth