Distinguished Alumni
Distinguished Alumni Award – 2022

Meg McLaughlin '87

Born in Los Angeles, Calif., you were the oldest of five children, with four younger brothers, all of whom would go on to attend Cate. Your late mother, Linda Hodge McLaughlin, was a graduate of Stanford and Boalt Hall School of Law. She was a California Superior Court judge for 10 years. Appointed by President George H. W. Bush in 1992, she served on the United States District Court for the Central District of California until her death in 1999. Your mother taught you the value of hard work and to fearlessly follow your passion, even if it led you into traditionally male-dominated fields. Your late father, Hugh McLaughlin, was a graduate of the University of Southern California and a chemical engineer, with a remarkable ability to fix anything. He fostered your love for math and science and was an unwavering source of support and encouragement. Boarding school was not on your parents' radar. After a friend invited you to come along on a tour of Cate, it was you who was determined to go and convinced your parents that Cate would provide you with the academic rigor you sought.

You arrived on the Mesa as a 9th grader, unsure of what to expect but full of enthusiasm. Whereas other students were faced with doing their own laundry for the first time, you were relieved to only be doing laundry for one and not seven. You immersed yourself in all Cate had to offer. Early on your teachers recognized that you had "a real talent [for] analyzing problems and then coming up with a systematic approach to finding a solution," and that your "combination of intelligence, creativity, and cleverness [was] unbeatable." You "[blended] seriousness of purpose with natural good humor."

Community service was an essential part of your Cate experience. You were Head of the Public Service Program, Head of Holiday Cheer, and Head of the Math Tutor Program. You participated in service trips with Los Niños and were a volunteer at the Special Olympics. Senior year, you served as a prefect in '25 House. You graduated from Cate with Honors and were the recipient of the Mathematics Prize, the Art Prize, and the Public Service Award.

In the fall of 1987, you enrolled at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass. You chose to study biology and founded the Biology Undergraduate Student Association (BUSA). In addition to excelling in your courses, you became an undergraduate research associate in Professor Gerald Fink's laboratory at the Whitehead Institute. There, you investigated the basic molecular mechanisms of transcription in the yeast *S. cerevisiae*, resulting in your first scientific publication in *Nature*. Attending M.I.T. was a transformative experience for you, as you learned to trust your instincts and think outside the box to solve problems.

Upon graduating from M.I.T., you enrolled in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and then transferred to Harvard Medical School as a third-year student. As a medical student in Dr. Thaddeus Dryja's laboratory at the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, you identified genetic mutations that explain one form of hereditary blindness, autosomal recessive retinitis pigmentosa. For this discovery, you received the HMS Henry Christian Asbury

Award and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) Continued Support Award for medical school tuition.

After graduating *magna cum laude* from Harvard Medical School, you completed a residency in Anatomic Pathology and a fellowship in Neuropathology at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Boston Children's Hospital. Committed to becoming a physician-scientist, you then returned to the M.I.T Cancer Center (now the Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research) for a post-doctoral fellowship with Professor Tyler Jacks. There, you developed genetically engineered mouse models of the hereditary cancer syndromes, Neurofibromatosis type 1 and type 2. For this postdoctoral work, you received a HHMI Postdoctoral Fellowship for Physicians and a Burroughs Wellcome Career Award.

Determined to put your clinical and scientific expertise to practical use to improve patient care, you joined the Novartis Institutes of Biomedical Research (NIBR) in 2006. You are currently an Executive Director at Novartis and lead the global Oncology Pathology & Biomarkers group. Your team studies the mechanism of action of drugs in patients and identifies those patients most likely to benefit from novel treatments. You, in partnership with another Cate alumnus, **Jim Deeds '85**, have pioneered the use of artificial intelligence to extract information from digital pathology images of patient tumor samples. In your time at Novartis, you have contributed to the development of Kisqali, Piqray, Tabrecta, Kymriah, Pluvicto, and many other oncology drugs that are improving the lives of patients suffering from cancer.

Over the years, you have given back to Cate by joining online discussions and hosting events for Cate alumni in the Boston area. In 1992, you were married to your husband, David Pellman, in the Katharine Thayer Cate Memorial Chapel, and you currently live with him and your two children, Jesse and Theo, in Cambridge, Mass. On snowy winter days, your mind still drifts to the Mesa and the feeling of warmth from the sun and old friends.

For your distinguished career as a physician-scientist, your dedication to Cate School, and your reputation as an engaged and thoughtful leader, we are honored to award you, Meg McLaughlin, Class of 1987, with Cate's Distinguished Alumni Award for 2022.