



## HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

### *Giving Back to Education*

### ***HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!***

*Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,*

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments.

Sincerely,

*Teresa Kroll, Chairman  
HPS Foundation Committee*

### **Genon (Rost) Murray - Class of 1976**

#### **Genon (Rost) Murray Tries Fitness & Creative Careers Before Discovering Love of Teaching**

By Kristine Jacobson

As a child growing up in the 1960s and 70s in Holdrege, Genon (Rost) Murray flourished as a young musician being surrounded by a talented and supportive community and a family that embraced music, art, and culture.

But when she graduated from Holdrege High School in 1976, she didn't pursue music as many thought she would. "I did not know what I wanted to do with my life, but the one thing I knew was that I would never, ever, ever teach. Ever," Genon said.

Throughout her career, her job titles have included fitness club general manager, executive assistant and creative producer at Universal Studios in Florida, juvenile prison counselor, and now, ironically, for the past 10 years - teacher.

"No one was more surprised than I was to find out how much I love teaching," Genon said.

#### **Growing Up in Holdrege**

Genon spent her entire childhood in Holdrege, living in the same house that her dad finished building when she was two weeks old.

Her dad, Waldo, was a certified public accountant, and her mom, Marcia, taught English at Holdrege High School. Both of her parents enjoyed creating and writing and filled their home with art and music.

"In my family heritage, there are a lot of artists and musicians

and teachers and pastors," Genon said. And, outside of her family, the community supported that culture as well.

"We were always surrounded by art and music and theater and culture," she said. "We had this wonderful environment in which we had the freedom to explore art and music with support and mentorship, outside of just a classroom situation. We had excellent artists and musicians around us all the time."

Growing up in Holdrege, Genon also appreciated the freedom to explore.

"A lot of my memories have to do with the idyllic Norman

Rockwell version of growing-up-in Holdrege, Nebraska, where you could ride your bike to the swimming pool with a dime wrapped in your towel and get an ice cream cone after you went swimming," she said. "You had complete freedom to be anywhere. We left in the morning, and we never came back until it was dark."

She described the public library as a "friend" and spent a lot of time there as a child. She wrote her first book at age 10. It was the story of a young girl going to summer camp. It was the beginning of her role as storyteller, which became an important part of her future career.

She also discovered as a child her passion for science and research.

## **Education**

In high school, Genon's passion was music. She started piano lessons at age 5 and continued that through high school. She played the French Horn in the band under the instruction of legendary HHS band teacher Verle Strattman. She competed nationally in both the French horn and in piano. She also sang in the HHS choir.

When she competed in music contests, Genon recalls scoring high in musical interpretation. "My strong suit as a musician was my ability to take a piece and tell the story of the emotion in the piece," she said.

Later in her career, she would call upon her musical interpretation talents to organize the creation of an original song played by a symphony to tell the story of Kartchner Caverns in Arizona. It was designed to engage the audience and draw an emotional response from them to encourage their continued support of the park.

When it came time to choose a career path after graduating from HHS, Genon didn't see a future in music. She thought nursing sounded like a noble profession. "I liked science," Genon said. "And, nursing is a great profession. You can get a job in nursing."



*Genon (Rost) Murray - Class of 1976*

But, after one semester of nursing school at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, she knew it wasn't for her. "It takes a very special person to be a nurse, and I am not that special person," she said.

She switched her major to sports medicine and enjoyed working with the athletic teams at UNL in that program of study. She graduated with a bachelor's of science degree in health education and sports medicine.

### **Early Career**

Genon first put her new degree to work at various jobs in Lincoln. She worked at an independent living center, in the wellness program at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, and then as general manager of the Cottonwood Club.

In 1989, she decided it was time for a change and moved to Florida.

Through a temp agency, she landed a job as an executive assistant at Universal Studios, which was just being built at the time. After a short time as an assistant, her boss promoted her to the project team that was creating Nickelodeon Studios and Back to the Future, The Ride.

"It was probably one of the best times of my life because we were working with some of the best people in the entertainment industry, including George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Alan Silvestri," she said. "Nothing like this ride had ever been done before. It was a complete creative process, and it was experiential storytelling."

She said the "Back to the Future" story belonged to Lucas and Spielberg, so it was important to them that the ride was produced well. "I was blessed with an opportunity to work with the best of the best," Genon said. She grasped onto that opportunity and made the most of it.

"You are given opportunities in life, and what you do with it is up to you," she said. "You either grab it with both hands and make it your own, or it slips through your fingers."

She credited her small-town roots to helping her make the most of this opportunity. Growing up in Holdrege, she had the chance to interact with various professionals from roofers and executives to musicians and janitors.

"You learn how to communicate with people of all different skills sets and talents, and you learn how to be respectful, which is a big deal in an organization," Genon said.

She said co-workers teased her about being from the Midwest, but they appreciated her authenticity and work ethic.

She worked at Universal for six years and then was recruited to work at Walt Disney World, which she did for one year before deciding to become a freelance creative producer. She hoped that being her own boss would allow her more flexibility to raise her young children, Megan and Liam.

She attracted some major clients, such as IBM, Lockheed Martin, Kennedy Space Center, and the Discovery Channel. Universal and Disney continued to hire her for projects as well.

She enjoyed working on "Shark Week" projects for the Discovery Channel and cooperating with NASA engineers and astronauts to create museum exhibits for the Kennedy Space Center.

### **Becoming A Teacher**

But, Genon's freelance career required more travel and time away from her young children, so she decided on a career change and earned a master's degree in

counseling. With that degree, she started work at a juvenile prison. But, after a scary prison incident, she switched gears again. Full Sail University, an Orlando university that focuses on educating students for careers in entertainment and media, was seeking someone to teach its first online classes.

She got the job. And, that's how she became a teacher.

She originally taught a class on storytelling and now teaches content strategy, development, and marketing to undergraduates and final project in the master's program.

"I think my journey has been going from what I loved, to what I thought I should do, back to what I loved," she said.

In addition to teaching, she also still freelances and travels the country speaking about storytelling with her business, Synthesis Storyworks. She works with companies and organizations to help them understand and tell their stories and determine the best way to communicate that story, whether it's shared through the media, websites, videos, or other distribution channels. She has also found a way to incorporate her interest in science with her storytelling strengths by working with engineering and tech firms. She recently taught the art of storytelling to a group of marketing executives at Cisco, a global technology company, in San Jose, Calif.

Outside of work, she has travelled to Asia to build homes with Habitat for Humanity and to the slums of India with Rotary International to immunize kids. Both of those experiences expanded her knowledge of storytelling and her sense of being part of a world community.

"I highly value connection with others, and I use storytelling as a means for connecting with others and connecting people with each other," Genon said.

She hopes that her students, co-workers or clients find a better way to connect with each other as a result of what they've learned from her about storytelling and most importantly, from each other's stories.

## About Us

*The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.*

### **Holdrege Public Schools Foundation**

505 14th Ave, PO Box 2002  
Holdrege, Nebraska 68949  
Holdrege Public Schools Foundation  
(308) 995-8663  
[holdregedusters.org](http://holdregedusters.org)

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Holdrege Public Schools Foundation, 505 14th Ave, PO Box 2002, Holdrege, NE 68949

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