

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

# FROM STUDENT TO SUCCESS STORY

Graduates share how their time at private school helped shape who they are and what they do, by **Camilla Cornell**

**Kristina Valjas**  
Olympic beach volleyball player  
Havergal College, 2005

When Kristina Valjas arrived at Havergal in Grade 7, she was a shy kid who barely said a word. "The small classes and having teachers who cared really made a difference," she said. "I came out of my shell and developed self-confidence."

By the time Valjas graduated, she had a cadre of close friends, many of whom she still sees today. "Six of them are coming over tomorrow night for dinner," she said. More to the point, she developed a passion for volleyball that took her all the way to the Rio Olympics with Canada's beach volleyball team.

"I wasn't one of those kids who played on every team," said Valjas, of her time at Havergal. "But that is where my love of volleyball started." One of her Havergal coaches encouraged her to join a club team to hone her skill, and she jumped at the chance. "I would say probably being at an all-girls school freed me to be myself and take risks without worrying what boys or anyone else was thinking," she said.

The organizational techniques she learned in high school also helped her cope with the workload of completing a degree in linguistics and playing varsity volleyball. Although Valjas plans to do a master's degree someday, for now she is focused on making it to the next Olympics.

**Robert Carsen**  
Director of operas, plays  
and musicals  
Upper Canada College, 1972

Robert Carsen is in Lausanne, Switzerland directing a production of the Monteverdi opera *L'Orfeo*. Next stop: New York, then Beijing, the Czech Republic and London.

It's a jet-setting lifestyle, but one Carsen loves.

He credits his parents for nurturing in him a thirst for the theatre, but says it was his teachers at Upper Canada College who helped him realize its potential as a career path.

He remembers with fondness a prep-school drama teacher who was, "rather eccentric in a slightly glamorous way," and who had a knack for unlocking the creativity in his students. "A school is only as good as its teachers and that changes all the time," said Carsen. "I was lucky."



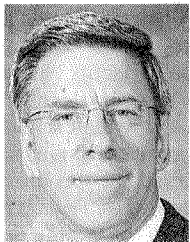
dad visited, they felt reassured their son would be in good hands.

Kuye never looked back. "I felt pushed by my fellow students and my teachers to take things outside my comfort zone," he said. When it came time to apply for university, his guidance counsellor encouraged him to try for a spot at Harvard. "I might not have even considered it."

Kuye has since completed a joint MBA/medical degree at the top of his class, and now works as an internal medicine resident physician at the Brigham and Women's Hospital, in Boston, and a clinical fellow at Harvard Medical School. His passion: improving health-care systems in low-income communities.

**Walter Dorn**  
Professor, defence scholar  
and United Nations consultant  
Toronto French School, 1979

Walter Dorn's father was a German, working for IBM in Montreal in the 1960s and '70s. When he was told the company needed a French speaker in his role, Dorn Sr. tried to learn, but to no avail. "He was older and not that adept with languages," said Dorn. "He ended up being part of the mass migration of English speakers from Montreal to Toronto."



To ensure he could speak French fluently, Dorn Jr. was enrolled in TFS (then Toronto French School) in Grade 7. He recalls being so overwhelmed during his entrance exam, "I ended up crying."

But in the ensuing years, Dorn learned to write tests in both English and French like a pro and stay cool under the pressure.

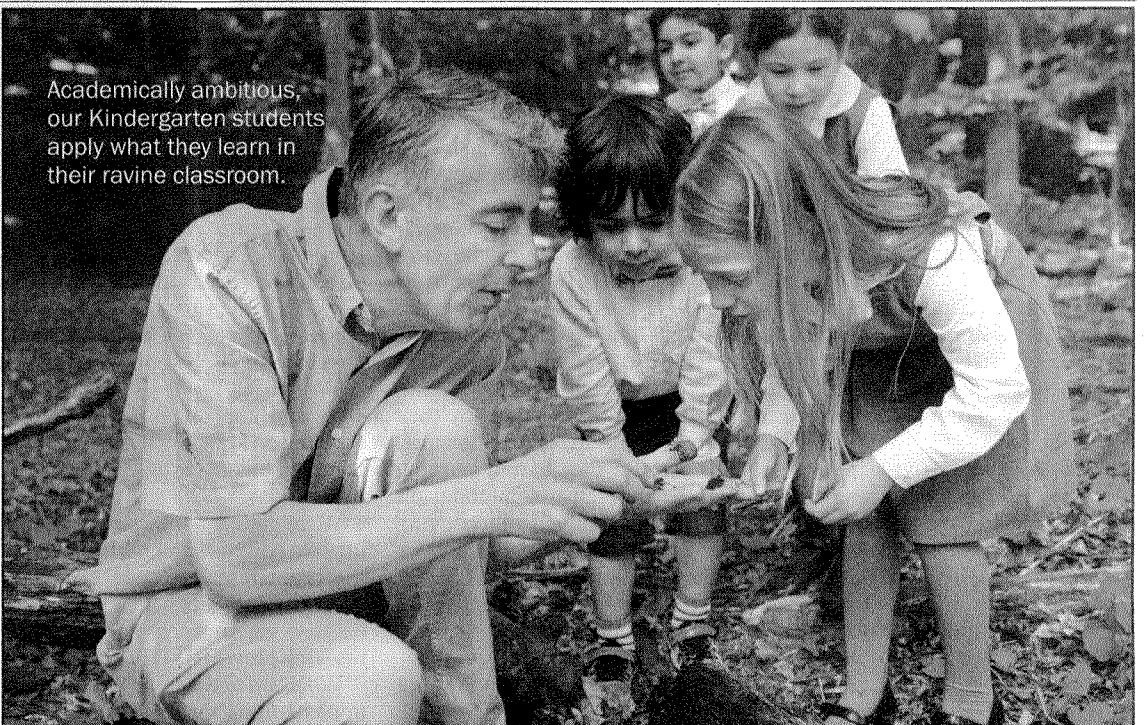
He went on to complete three degrees at the University of Toronto and now teaches advanced peacekeeping at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston and the Canadian Forces College in Toronto.

Dorn's proficiency in French has helped him during postings in Francophone countries and he's easily able to offer training sessions for French speakers. He has most recently become an outspoken proponent for Canada's participation in UN peacekeeping missions. "Peacekeeping," he said, "is good for Canada and good for the world."



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Olympic beach volleyball player Kristina Valjas says she made friends for life while attending Havergal College.



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