

Germannanna grad's journey 'a crazy trip'

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

In 2010, Bryant Lyttle was a “middling” senior at Orange County High School who'd had to repeat Algebra II and had not been accepted to any of the four-year colleges he'd applied to.

Today, he is finishing up a master's degree at Oxford University and plans to pursue a doctorate in cultural anthropology.

In between, he attended Germanna Community College, and he credits Germanna with giving him the self-confidence to set off on a journey into the highest levels of academia.

“It's been a crazy trip,” Lyttle said.



Lyttle (middle of the second row) is pictured at Oxford's Linacre College. He returned home to study virtually amid the pandemic.

Lyttle was the first in his family to consider a post-high school degree. His parents were supportive, but they didn't have much to offer

in the way of advice.

At Orange County High School, Lyttle said, there were too many

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students and too few guidance counselors to provide the level of one-on-one support he needed.

"I was mostly on my own," he said.

His math and science grades in high school weren't great and colleges weren't in a rush to accept him. The University of Virginia rejected him and so did George Mason and Virginia Tech.

Even if those schools had accepted him, it would have been difficult for him to afford tuition, and to top it off, he wasn't exactly sure what he wanted to study.

Lyttle did take a dual-enrollment class in high school and had earned some credits at Germanna. So, unsure what else to do, he applied to continue his studies there.

On the Germanna campus, he was surrounded by students who were older, who had more life or work experience and who came from different backgrounds. It opened his eyes.

"Germanna was helpful in that it taught me how to be a student and it also provided me with a bit of a unique perspective that I wasn't expecting," Lyttle said. "It kind of let me put more value on practical experience than on academic experience."

"Someone can get rejected from pretty much every four-year school they apply to and still want to keep going and not let that deter them," he continued. "Those are the kind of people

I was surrounded with at Germanna."

Lyttle said Germanna wasn't an easy ride for him. His favorite professor failed him, he recalled.

"He was tough, but fair," Lyttle said. "Even though I had difficulty in his class, because I was making an effort, he never made me feel stupid or less than when I was struggling. I was appreciative of that attitude."

Lyttle earned an associate degree in general studies with a specialization in psychology and spent some time in the work force as a security guard.

Then he applied and was accepted to George Mason University. While there, he received a letter informing him that his high GPA made him eligible for a study abroad program at Oxford University.

"I thought, 'Why not?'" Lyttle said.

He was accepted into the program and spent a semester in 2018 studying at the oldest and one of the most prestigious universities in the English-speaking world.

"I just loved the whole experience," Lyttle said. "So once I graduated George Mason, I thought, 'I'll just apply there for graduate school. What's the harm?'"

He applied for a degree program in cultural anthropology and was accepted into Linacre College—one of the 39 semi-independent colleges that make up Oxford University. Linacre is one of Oxford's most diverse colleges in terms of its membership, which represents 133 differ-

ent countries—and it has other similarities with Germanna, Lyttle said.

"[Linacre's] motto is 'No end to learning,' and I got that from Germanna as well—that learning is a journey," he said.

Lyttle spent the first year of his graduate program in England, but when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, he had to return home to Orange County and continue his studies online.

He's now finishing up his thesis—a meta-analysis of existing ethnographies, or scientific descriptions of the customs of individual cultures, to determine what makes them worth reading to other cultures.

He's been receiving emails to apply for scholarships to continue his work at the doctorate level and he plans to follow through on that once the pandemic is over.

Lyttle said his dream is to work for the U.S. Institute of Peace, a national, nonpartisan institute founded by Congress in 1984 to promote nonviolent conflict resolution around the world.

"It would be thrilling to work with them," he said.

Lyttle said he hopes his story inspires others to consider Germanna as their "second chance."

"If you have the desire to move forward, community college is your second chance in a lot of ways," he said. "I wasn't a great high school student, but because Germanna gave me the chance that four-year colleges wouldn't, now I'm a student at Oxford."

Celebration fills area with love, awareness

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Rainbows were everywhere in downtown Fredericksburg on Saturday.

Rainbow flags fluttered from lamp posts along Caroline, William and Princess Anne streets and rainbows brightened stickers, shirts, socks, T-shirts, shoes, tutus, capes and sunglasses worn by the several thousand who marched in the largest Pride parade the city has seen.

“This makes me very proud of Fredericksburg,” said Mayor Mary Katherine Greenlaw, surveying the colorful scene.

June is Pride Month,



Charles Castelly (center) dances with the crowd at the Pride event at Maury Park on Saturday.

when LGBTQ communities around the world celebrate the freedom to be themselves, honor those who struggled and died for that freedom and advocate for greater acceptance going forward.

Saturday's Pride event

and parade was the first event hosted by Fredericksburg Pride, an organization that achieved registered nonprofit status in March, founder Meegana Henry said.

“We just want to give the community infor-

mation about who we are,” Henry said. “Everybody knows someone in the LGBTQ community, whether or not they know they do.”

The Pride event started at 10 a.m. with a festival in Maury Park, with vendors, entertainment and booths providing information and resources for the LGBTQ community.

The march began at 1 p.m. at City Dock.

“Growing up here in Fredericksburg, we didn't have this,” Henry told the masses of people—those who identify as LGBTQ and their allies—assembling for the march. “There has been a lot of change. There is a lot of love and a lot of

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PRIDE THROUGH THE YEARS: UMW STUDENTS COLLECT LGBTQ ALUMNI STORIES

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

When Mark Thaden first arrived at the University of Mary Washington in the late 1990s, the campus LGBTQ group met quietly, behind closed doors, in an upstairs room of the

campus center.

“It was a social group, but it was very much about support,” said Thaden, a 2002 graduate of UMW who is now the university's executive director of alumni relations.

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FILE / REZA MARVASHTI

Students stand in silent opposition to Westboro Baptist Church members just before a performance of 'The Laramie Project.'



Venus Vargas (left) and Inti Mooney-Guerra attend the Fredericksburg Pride event held at Maury Park in downtown Fredericksburg on Saturday.



Friends and family members also marched in the Pride parade along Caroline Street to support them.

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support. But there's more work to do."

Henry introduced guest speaker Quinn Fontaine, a transgender actor and comedian. Fontaine spoke about being seven years into his transition from female to male.

"And I am seven years sober," he said. "It gets better."

Fontaine also introduced his mom, Nancy Cook, whom he called "his number one fan."

"I've also been her number one challenge," he said. "But now, all of her friends have reached out to her to ask, 'How do I love my LGBTQ family member?'"

Cook told the audience that she asked herself a simple question.

"I thought to myself, 'I loved him before, why don't I love him now?' she recalled. "And it was that simple."

As the parade started, organizers asked participants to stay on the right side of the street—but by the time the parade



PHOTOS BY SUZANNE CARR ROSSI

Kasey Roper (left) and Sydney Montgomery (right) march in the Pride Parade.

reached Caroline Street, it had spilled into both sides with no resistance.

Cynthia McKenna, rector at Trinity Episcopal Church on College Avenue, marched with members of her congregation.

"The Christian church in general has been very

hard on the LGBTQ community," she said. "We are trying to set that right. God loves everyone and we believe in equality and inclusion."

Broadway Harris, one of the event's organizers, told those marching that their ability to be proud

of themselves could be an inspiration to those who are still scared.

"When you get to be yourself, you can breathe easier," he said.

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Thaden said he was not out when he came to UMW from rural Maryland and a small, Catholic high school. At the club carnival early his freshman year, he was excited to see that there was an LGBTQ campus group, but he was too nervous at first to approach members.

Luckily, a friend signed him up to receive the group's emails and the meetings became formative in his journey toward self-acceptance.

"That's where I started feeling more comfortable, being with people who were comfortable with themselves," Thaden said. "That's where I started feeling like it was OK."

Thaden's memories and those of two dozen other LGBTQ alumni were recorded and transcribed in 2019 by students in Associate Professor Erin Devlin's Oral History seminar.

"Oral history is a powerful tool for amplifying the voices of individuals, especially those who have been marginalized," Devlin said. "This collection will benefit all of us as we work to more fully capture the diversity of experiences at UMW."

The recordings are now part of UMW Libraries'

Special Collections and University Archives. They were released to the public this year during Pride Month, which is celebrated in June.

In his role as director of alumni relations, Thaden helped recruit "narrators" to participate in the project by reaching out to members of the newly created LGBTQ Alumni Affinity Group.

The narrators' experiences span decades, from the late 1960s through the 2010s, and some have difficult stories to tell.

"This is not about sugar-coating or revisionist history," Thaden said. "It's really about capturing these people's experiences and memories for future generations."

For Thaden, the LGBTQ group was small and kept a low profile, but it existed. Twenty years earlier, LGBTQ students did not have even that small safe space.

Narrator Greg Stull, a 1983 graduate of UMW and now the university's theater director, said a friend of his worked to establish a club for queer students, but met with resistance.

"Alex used to post things on the residence hall bulletin board and they would be torn down," Stull told UMW student Kyle Moore in his interview for the project. "It



SUBMITTED

Mark Thaden (second row, second from left) seen with members of PRISM in the late 90s/early 00s.

was not a very welcoming environment at that time."

Thaden said the group might have continued to operate under the radar were it not for the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay University of Wyoming student who was beaten and left to die from his injuries.

"That brutal murder was something that we as a club discussed," Thaden said. "We decided that we need to be more out and proud, and somewhat activist. We need to make sure we're being seen and accepted."

The group changed its name to PRISM—People for the Rights of Individuals of Sexual Minorities—and still exists today.

One of the first "bold" events PRISM hosted in the early 2000s was a drag show.

"We didn't know if anyone would actually show up," Thaden said. "We had no idea. But it sold out. There was a line down Campus Walk to get in."

The drag show has become an annual event for PRISM, along with hosting campus-wide observances of Coming Out Day and Day of Silence.

In 2003, UMW theater, under Stull's direction, presented "The Laramie Project," a play about the Matthew Shepard murder. Members of the Westboro Baptist Church—a hate group that's not affiliated with any Baptist denomination—came to



SUBMITTED

A performer at UMW's first drag show in 2002.

Fredericksburg to protest the production.

Stull said he asked UMW administrators to let the students lead the university's response to the Westboro members and they agreed. Students organized a silent, candlelight vigil across College Avenue from the protest.

In his interview, Stull calls this event a "watershed moment" for the university.

"I thought it was a really important moment because our students were standing up for what is right, and doing the right thing, and standing up for gay students," he said. "I was really proud of our students for their response."

UMW—which used to send women to student

court for wearing pants, according to 1969 graduate Iris Harrell—has come a long way, said Thaden, who returned to Fredericksburg in 2011 to start his job in alumni relations.

"I am constantly surprised at how much diversity is embraced now," he said. "As a person who is a member of the LGBTQ community and an alum and someone who is there every day, I have never felt safer and more accepted than at Mary Washington."

Listen to all interviews from the Alumni Oral History Project at umw.access.preservica.com.

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Fifth graders in Stafford find video pals in Uganda

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
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One of things students at Green Valley, a primary school in central Uganda, wanted to know about Kelley Kruzel's fifth grade class at Kate Waller Barrett in Stafford County was, "Do you have any traditional dances?"

"We had just danced the Macarena and the Cha Cha

Slide at the school talent show, so we talked about those and sent them a video," Kruzel said with a laugh.

The Green Valley students wanted to share one of their traditional dances, a kiganda dance they would use to welcome visitors to their village. They stayed after school for three hours—until 9 p.m.—rehearsing and performing the dance with drums and other

traditional instruments.

"It was just beautiful," Kruzel said. "When my kids saw the video, one boy said, 'If I had known what they were going to do, I would have worked harder at the Macarena.'"

Kruzel's class meets for once-a-week video chats with Tugavune Ronnie Wilson's fifth grade class at Green Valley Child Care Primary School in Uganda since March and

Kruzel said the experience has "opened up my kids' eyes for sure."

"They have learned not to feel sorry for others, but to have empathy," she said.

Empatico, a free web tool that matches classrooms around the world, connected the two teachers.

Kruzel said she registered

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at the site, but had forgotten about it until Wilson reached out to her.

For the first meet, each teacher prepared the students with questions for the other class, but the Ugandan students were too nervous to talk on camera.

Green Valley—a private Christian school that Wilson started with his brother to meet the need for education in the area—has only one computer.

The first meeting with Kruzal's class was the first time many of the students had seen the computer used, let alone been invited to talk into it, Kruzal said.

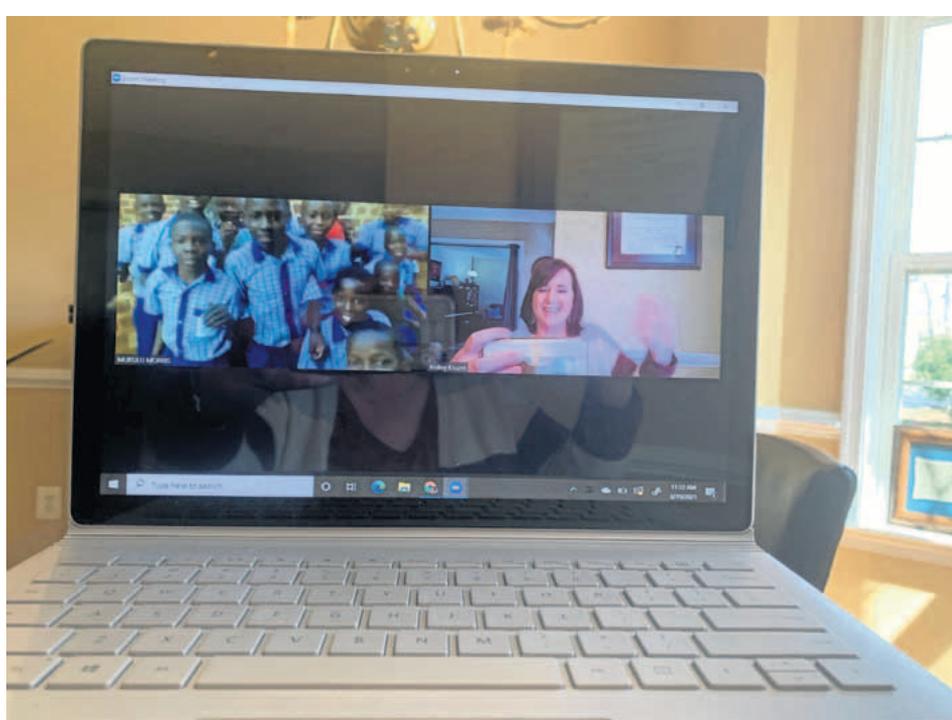
“So they mostly just stared at us while the teacher answered our questions,” she said. “There was one brave soul, Calvin, who wants to be a lawyer when he grows up, and he spoke a little, but my class chants a lot and they were chanting ‘You’ve got this’ and I think that freaked him out.”

Kruzal's students wanted to know if the Ugandan students saw animals on their way to school, what the climate is like, what subjects they study and what they ate for lunch.

They learned that the Ugandan students see farm animals on their way to school, just like many Stafford County students, and that they study many of the same subjects.

Other aspects of the school day at Green Valley are very different. The students walk to get water and their classroom has a dirt floor and no air conditioning.

Wilson shared a video with Kruzal's class of the daily lunch—a grain por-



SUBMITTED

Kate Waller Barrett Elementary teacher Kelley Kruzal leads her class in a video chat with students from Green Valley Child Care Primary School in Uganda.

ridge topped with beans that he serves out of large cast iron pots.

For the next meet, which was two hours long, Kruzal talked with each of the Ugandan students one-on-one and answered their questions.

“They had just had their presidential election—they have had the same president for 40 years—so they wanted to know about our president,” Kruzal said. “They wanted to know if our trees lose leaves in the wintertime, so I took the computer outside to show them the trees.”

As the Green Valley students warmed up to talking to the computer, the weekly meets became more lively. The two classes played a game of That's Me, standing if the teacher read something they could answer “Yes” to—such as “Do you have siblings?” or “Do you like art?”

Kruzal's class learned that the Ugandan students were preparing for

their final exams, so they put together a care package filled with pencils and other small gifts and handwritten letters of encouragement.

The Ugandan connection spilled out of Kruzal's classroom to the rest of Kate Waller Barrett. During the student-run Penny Wars fundraiser, the school raised \$600 for Green Valley, money that will be spent on repairs and to expand the school so that it can bring back more students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kruzal also learned that seven of Wilson's students live at the school because they have nowhere else to go.

“So we'll start working on a way to find support for those kids,” she said.

Kruzal said her class was already “a kind class,” but that she has observed them thinking outside themselves more since they started talking to Wilson's students.

“One student came in

one day and asked if we could do a neighborhood cleanup,” she said. “I'm not sure she would have thought of that were it not for the Ugandan class.”

Kruzal said her class has discussed the difference between feeling sorry for the Ugandan students and having empathy for them.

“They may have no computer and a dirt floor, but that's what they have and they are making the best of it,” she said. “We can acknowledge that we have more and be grateful for what we've been given.”

The school year is winding down for both classes, but Kruzal said she plans to keep up the connection with Green Valley school in coming years.

“We just fell in love with this class,” she said. “They have my heart at this point.”

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