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Alumna brings passion to Summer Odyssey program

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Alumna brings passion to Summer Odyssey program

It was 1979 when Libby Hass Silvestri '92 first stepped onto the Dominican campus as a student. She was a 14-year-old student with a birthday present – private voice lessons in Angelico Hall with an elderly opera singer who toured Europe in her day.

“I got this dream when I was kindergarten-age of being one of the lead singers in The Beatles. We had a Persian rug in our living room about as big as what I imagined a stage would be. My mom would put on the vinyl of *Abbey Road*, and I’d pretend to play the tambourine and sing right next to Paul,” Libby recalls, smiling.

Now, more than 35 years later, Libby is back at Dominican -- this time doing the teaching. She was an instructor in [Summer Odyssey](#), an innovative two-week program designed specifically for academically gifted and creatively talented students in grades 2-9 from Marin County’s public and independent schools.

Summer Odyssey, which concluded on July 31, offered for the first time morning and/or afternoon classes. Libby, along with colleague Beth Kraft, taught a class entitled “Thinking Like Leonardo” from 9 a.m. to noon and another class “Mona Lisa Smile” from 1-4 p.m.

It was Libby’s charge, as an alumna who came through [Dominican's School of Education and Counseling Psychology](#) to earn both her single-subject in English and a [multiple subject credential](#), to teach Da Vincian strategies for thinking creatively and techniques for sharpening the senses and harmonizing mind and body, in her words, “to tap into their unique intelligences and open their minds and hearts to the endless possibilities that will serve them well in this changing world.”

The dreams of Libby’s students was inspired by science, architecture, coding, and art and not by John, Paul, George and Ringo.

“The beauty of the Summer Odyssey program is you have teachers developing their own curriculums and it is being driven by their passions,” says Libby, who last month began her eighth year as a [Summer Odyssey instructor](#).

“You want children to be on fire about learning and find great pleasure in stretching their minds and bodies in many different ways. Imagine the ongoing creation of a life that is a work of art. Teaching is symbiotic; if my students have grown and learned, odds are that I have as well, and that is quite satisfying at the end of a day. Some of the most interesting and joyful people I knew growing up were my high school and college professors. They inspired me to go into teaching.”

Libby was drawn to Dominican by its small class sizes and close proximity to her home. Her mother-in-law, Valerie Scatena, graduated from Dominican in 1963, and Libby has many ties to the University including one of her early mentors, Mary Jane Burke '74, now Superintendent of Schools for Marin County. Libby has been a public school teacher in Marin for 22 years. She currently teaches third grade at Lu Sutton Elementary School in Novato.

Recognizing Libby’s strengths in art and science, a friend suggested that Libby join Summer Odyssey. The program, which has about 120 students enrolled this summer, gives Libby the freedom to use her personal interests and research to adapt courses for children. For example, some of her other Summer Odyssey classes over the years have been “The Rainbow of Exploration” based on the science of color, a “Tune-Up” class where students explored music from a variety of angles - singing, song writing, building simple instruments, dancing, analyzing songs as a reflection of culture and history.

“My role here at Summer Odyssey is to set up an opportunity for these young people to explore, create, self-reflect, and discover,” Libby explains. “In the teaching profession, you find yourself to be a life coach for children as well as covering the academics. It’s so important as parents and teachers that we are hyper aware of the messages we send and the lessons we model. These kids are sponges and miss nothing.”

Summer Odyssey concluded on July 31 on the Forest Meadows Field where students in the “Yes ... It is Rocket Science” class launched their project rockets.

For more information about Summer Odyssey, call 415-482-3549 or email odyssey@dominican.edu.