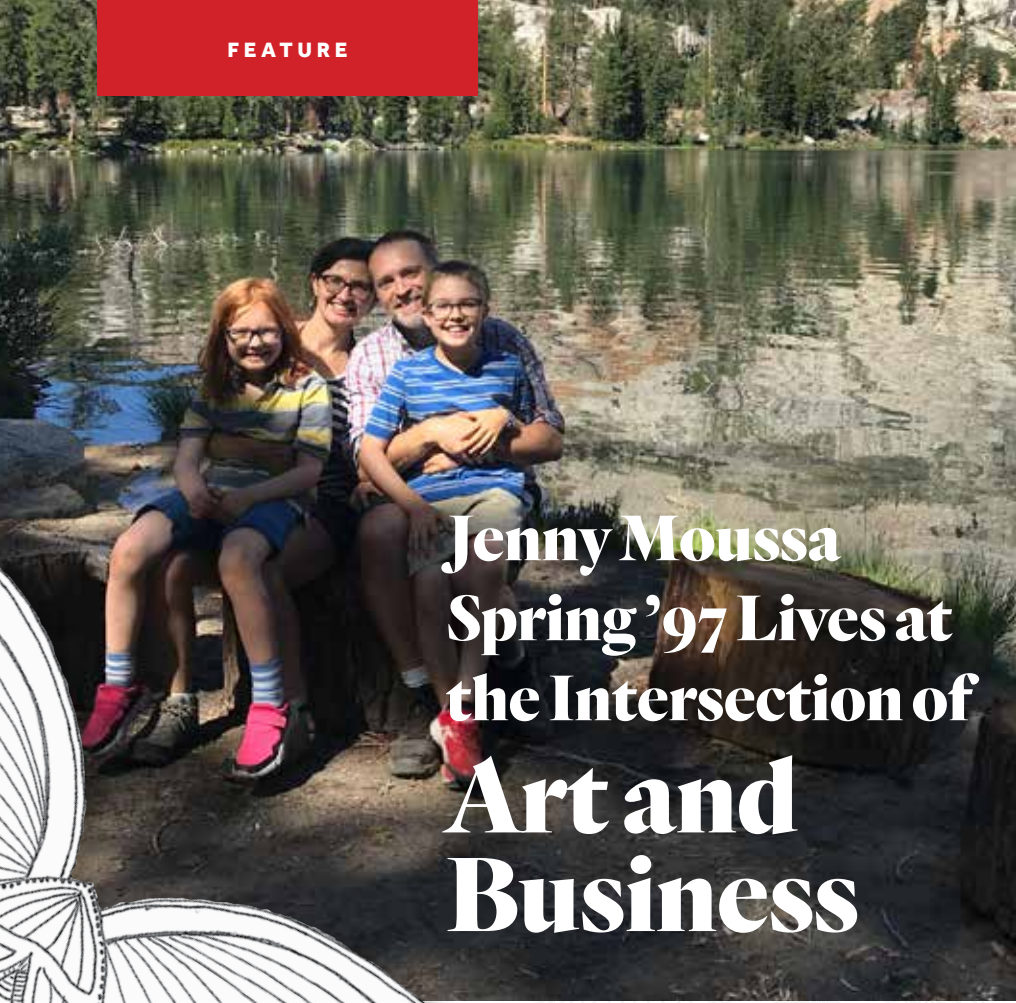




Jenny Moussa Spring '97 Lives at the Intersection of Art and Business



The moment Jenny Moussa

Spring '97 explodes onto the screen of a Zoom call, you know you're in for a fun chat. Her energy vibrates through cyberspace, and her contagious laugh and emotive expressions perfectly convey her creativity. What Spring learned to do at MICDS, and what she's continued through her professional life, is to marry creativity and productivity.

The Brand Strategy and Studio Relations Manager for Disney Publishing Worldwide is embedded at Pixar Animation Studios and works on the company's publishing programs. Those books your kids love that complement their favorite Pixar movies? Spring is responsible for bringing them to life. She thrives at the intersection of creativity and business, and loves every minute.

A self-professed quiet academic when she first arrived at MICDS, Spring took advantage of opportunities and relationships with teachers to find her way. In 1989, her family moved to St. Louis from Germany following her father's career path, and the transition from Europe to the United States—and from her home to a new house—was rough. "**Mrs. Kathleen Armstrong** was my fifth-grade teacher and she was so warm and welcoming. She, and many of my other teachers, offered a welcome to the school and to the country," she said. MICDS was the only school she visited, and she immediately fell in love. "I remember seeing Eliot Chapel and thinking, 'This place is so special. It's old and unique, and full of tradition.'" She

appreciates the stability and longevity of an institution that was around for a century before she arrived, and that continues to flourish after she graduated.

"I have so many good memories from MICDS; it's hard for me to narrow down," Spring said, before talking about her involvement in Troubadours throughout her time in the Upper School. She credits **Mrs. Carolyn Hood** with careful guidance toward confidence. She was a "Jet Girl" in *West Side Story* freshman year, and she earned the role of Linda Rosen in the freshman-sophomore production of *Up the Down Staircase* freshman year—not a main character but enough of a stage presence to give Spring a taste of performance and a stretch from her own personality. By senior year, she was ready to take on the role of Reno Sweeney in *Anything Goes*, a lounge singer that allowed her to "go out with a bang." She reflected on the growth that happened those four years. "Senior year, everything came together, everything we worked for all those years. I was able to come into my own, and I thank Mrs. Hood for that," she said. "Being a confident adult, moving through this world...a lot of that has to do with those performances."

She enjoyed all the traditions that were so appealing to her as a prospective student: Lessons and Carols, Dance Club, Troubadours, and May Day. "I was able to do all four years of May Day and then I got to be the girl in the white dress!" She made connections with her teachers, and trusted them to steer her in the right direction. "I loved Mr. Houser, my Spanish teacher. He was the friendliest, kindest person. I skipped a couple of levels of Spanish at his encouragement and was successful. He was the teacher I brought my college essay to. He said it wasn't up to my usual standards and I trusted him and respected him. That feedback was extremely helpful." She participated in the alumni writing contest and submitted pieces to Greenleaves, the student literary magazine. She wrote



01. Jenny's parents included this photo in her senior yearbook ad.



02. Jenny's senior picture.

03. Jenny in the role of Reno Sweeney in the MICDS production of *Anything Goes*.

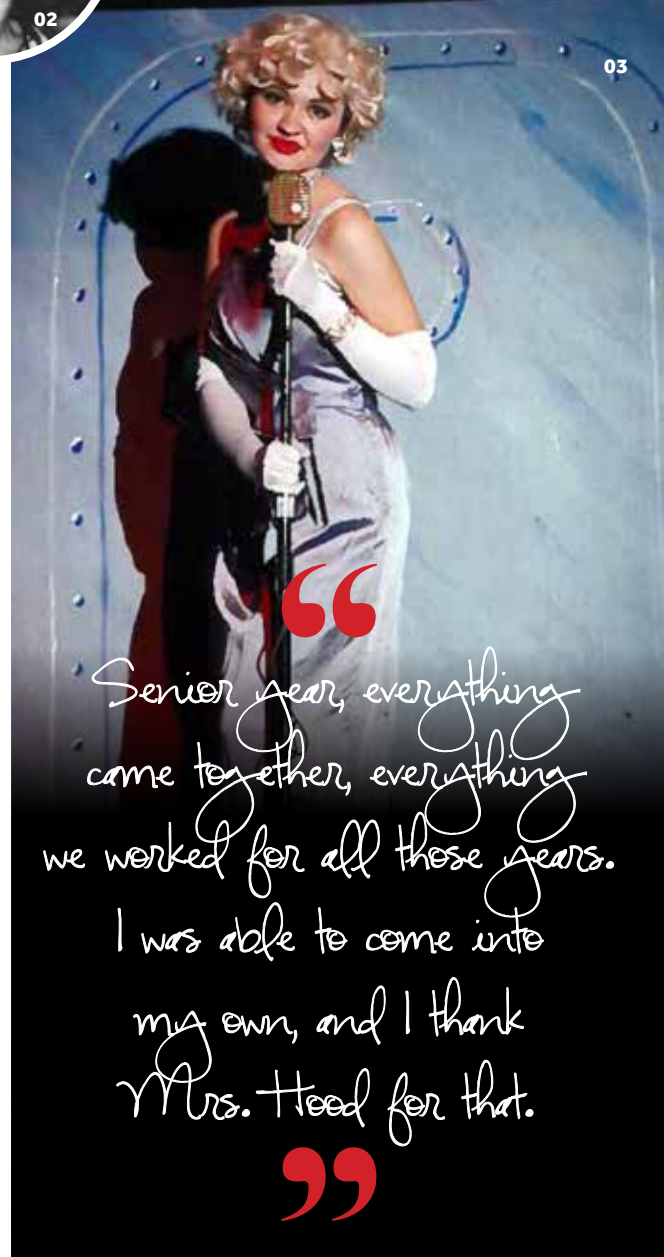
04. Jenny, lower left, gathers with other seniors at their final Lessons and Carols.

for the student newspaper. "I felt like every teacher was with me every step of the way, and I had so much support for learning as much as I could," Spring said. "I was happy to be a nerd!" Her favorite spot on campus was hanging out on a bench in the breezeway of Founders' Court. "I loved watching everyone coming and going. It was the crossroads and I loved seeing my friends and everyone throughout the day."

Those positive experiences, and a love of books, writing, and editing, led her to follow her heart in college. She earned a degree in art history and creative writing from Columbia University before starting a career that merges art and storytelling. She began at Penguin Publishing, working in international children's book licensing and Scholastic Book Fairs and catalogs, that culminated in going to the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the largest student publishing fair. "That was a wonderful time," Spring said. "It was a great first job to have."

By this point, she was dating Jonathan Spring. They were ready to move out of New York City, but not yet ready for California. The couple headed to Boston, following a career opportunity for the man who would become her husband. Spring enjoyed a year of a graduate program in children's literature—"I got my academic hat on, and I got to do a lot of writing." She found a role at Houghton Mifflin and then transitioned to the Museum

>> continued on page 22



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>> continued from page 21

of Fine Arts in Boston, leveraging her licensing experience. "I worked in the basement of the museum, which feels like a children's book in itself," she laughed.

Finally, it was time to go west. Spring had collaborated with Chronicle Books, one of the top independent publishers in the United States, while with the museum. She found a role there, working for several years on the sales team with a hand on the creative side as well, weighing the perfect balance of art and sales and business. "That's my throughline: business and creativity coming together and making it possible for these creative things to come out in the world," she said. Then her career took an unexpected turn.

"It was my lucky day when I came in for an interview at Pixar," said Spring. "I loved already working at the intersection of business and storytelling, and now it's storytelling and filmmaking. I hit the ground running and learned an entirely new business." The publishing division within a studio offers a fascinating opportunity to grow. There are always new things to learn, including the pipeline of making films and their various priorities. Her special power is in developing relationships and managing the brand strategies of Pixar and Lucasfilm as they relate to Disney Publishing.

Spring has been at Pixar for nearly seven years and still loves it. "There are always new films, new stories, and

I felt like every teacher was with me every step of the way, and I had so much support for learning as much as I could.

different sensitivities and priorities," she said. "It's never the same job twice, which keeps it exciting." She appreciates that Pixar values the creativity in all of its employees, not just the people making films. "Pixar offers a robust education and extra-curricular program that reminds me of my time at MICDS," Spring said. "You can take a writing class, join a band, learn filmmaking software...there are outlets to express yourself outside of work. It's a really fun environment." She's thrilled that her singing and dancing talents from high school are still being used in a band she formed with some colleagues. She reflected how her work environment mirrors her education: "At MICDS, your main job is being a student with all the academics, but you also get to lean into a wide variety of interests."

She encourages creative students to seek a degree that supports their passion. "A creative major has served me very well," she said. "If you're going to liberal arts college, they all have a tremendous amount of value. If you feel passionate about a particular area, go in and excel and then when you start your career, develop an expertise in whatever it is you're doing. There are so many different areas of my work, but publishing specifically is something I dove into head-first right when I first started." She learned the entire process, from working with

authors to understanding the logistics of how a book is ultimately published. "When you know how the whole ecosystem works, you're someone people will call on. Your education doesn't have to be about everything, but after you graduate, work to become an expert in your particular field."

An MICDS education set a firm foundation for Spring's success throughout her life. She notes, as many MICDS graduates do, that she learned to write well before college. She recounts an early class where a professor handed back graded essays while commenting, "These were dreadful. You don't know how to write." Spring had earned an A, thanks to MICDS. "I had it down pat from the start: a thesis, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. I felt very well prepared." Later, her stage experience came in handy when she was launching



The Spring family enjoys Yosemite National Park in Summer 2021.

01. Celebrating with the Coco filmmakers and their Oscar.

02. A performance with her band, The Heuristics.



her career. "At job interviews, starting in a new position, each of these turning points, I knew how to carry myself. We had to make speeches at podiums, adhere to the dress code, learn poise. I knew how to maneuver in the world because of MICDS."

These days, Spring still pursues artistic outlets in her free time, what little she has with two boys, Henry, who is in fifth grade, and Tommy, in third. "Baseball season is picking up," she laughed. The Spring family had also adopted a dog a few weeks prior to our interview. Daisy, a big, black mixed-breed, "is like having another kid, which I didn't expect." Spring has been working from home during the pandemic, and while she misses the physical space of her office, she appreciates the flexibility to ensure Daisy gets all the walks she needs. She still practices and performs with her band, The Heuristics, and she pulled on one of her Pixar-sponsored creative classes of Pysanky (Ukrainian egg decorating) to start a new hobby. "I started drawing during the pandemic, when I found that all the things that normally felt comforting weren't enough," she said. "I was doing a picture a day but have slowed down now." She estimates that she has drawn about 150 mandalas, enough to paper a whole wall in her house. "You don't need to be able to draw. Just write, sit there and do these repeating patterns."

The repeating pattern of Spring's life is easily found in her ability to thrive where creativity meets life and business. The student labeled "Most Outgoing" by her senior class still likes to sit in the breezeway—whether it's online or in the office—and make connections with art and people.

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