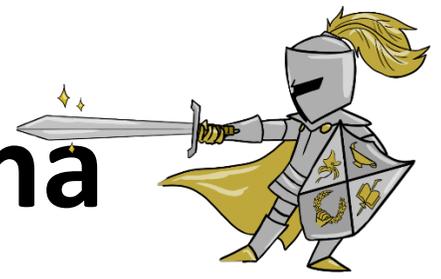


A Knight Worthy
Welcome Back to
School

The Acta Diurna



October 8, 2020



Welcome Back Knights!

By Niko Tsvourakis

Your editors are too humble, so I have embraced the task of welcoming you all back to school and kicking off the 2020-2021 edition of your school newspaper—*The Acta Diurna*. They do not want to draw attention to themselves; rather, they want the articles and ideas to stand out. I love that selflessness and hope you will appreciate it, too. To be fair, this short welcome back edition is several weeks late! The staff had grand ambitions and were ready. But bureaucracies are slow, even slower in a pandemic.

Perhaps it has become cliché to say that the last 7 months have been surreal, but the adjective is ubiquitous because for most it is true. Everyone is going through something. We are living in a bizarre confluence of events that give meaning to the expression *the perfect storm*. We blame 2020 on any aberration, tragedy, or bad fortune. And we are enduring all of this while the specter of a lingering virus informs literally every decision we make.

There is no panacea to fix all of this, nor some fancy *Endgame* time travel mechanism that will allow us to go back, snap our fingers, and make things normal again. What we do have are opportunities to reprioritize, to show gratitude and grace, to be creative and even thrive. And we have each other! My fifth graders reminded me of this with the wisdom that they excavated when they sought out their own motivating precepts inspired by the book *Wonder*. Despite the masks and DLPs, in-person and virtual faces, synchronous and asynchronous learning, and seemingly endless sanitation—despite all of it and so much more, we still have each other, and that is much more than many folks can say these days. We still wake every morning with purpose. The opportunity to continue to teach and learn, to interact, to laugh and sometimes cry together affords us much more than practical knowledge; it gives us a bit of normalcy and a critical support network for coping and flourishing.

The *Acta Diurna* staff hopes your paper will be a small part of that. We want it to be something great and an opportunity to connect. Margaret Schedler, one of your editors, mentioned that every great school needs a great paper, and she wants ours to reflect what makes us unique: our joy, our diversity, and our depth. We will strive to keep you abreast of issues and opinions in and out of Altamont. We hope that, as we hold a mirror to our still-spinning world, we give you a glimmer of hope and joy.

Have something you want to share or want to some more info? Reach out to one of our editors: [Lucine Carsen](#), [Claudia Williams](#), and [Margaret Schedler](#).

Student Life

What Did Altamont Students Do During Quarantine?

By [Madeleine Beckwith](#)

In March 2020, COVID-19 shut the United States down. Across America, schools, businesses, and churches closed their doors, and the citizens of the U.S. hunkered down to wait out the virus. Whilst trapped inside, many combatted their boredom with unusual tactics. Today we explore the question, what did Altamont students do while quarantined?

In pursuit of this answer, I sent out a survey to random students in each grade. Yesterday, the answers came back, and with surprising results. Unanimously, Altamont students utilized their break to spend time with family, grow creatively, live healthier lives, and strengthen their characters.

In almost every response I received, there existed one common thread, family. The COVID break gave students time to strengthen their familial connections. Without the burden of homework and other school responsibilities, kids actually had time to spare. Not only did students report growing closer to their immediate family, but they were also able to visit with relatives from far away.



The second most common response I received involved art and exercise. Over the break, students had the opportunity to pursue more creative outlets. Students reported drawing, painting, learning to cook, learning to embroider, learning to make floral arrangements, playing video games, and playing piano. Others reported using this precious free time to exercise. Students pursued new sports as well as developed their skills in sports they already participated in. Soccer, badminton, running, and bicycling were amongst the most popular sports played this COVID season.

The last most common response dealt with personal growth and social justice. Quarantine provided students with the opportunity to self-reflect. Students reported taking a step back, seeing the aspects of their lives in which they could grow, and bettering themselves. Also, because of the social justice issues going on in today's society, quarantine gave students the opportunity to speak out and be more involved. Students reported that they raised and donated money to BLM and other social justice causes.

While COVID took a terrible toll, the time spent off gave students a unique opportunity. Students were able to grow and better themselves as people, foster their creativity, exercise, and spend more time with family. Overall, Altamont students used their time well in quarantine.



Being A Conservative At Altamont

By Jaye Conn

My name is Jaye Conn. I am a senior and the president of the Young Conservatives club here at Altamont. A couple of years ago I decided to help put our Young Conservatives club back together. I am very interested in philosophy and politics, so creating an environment where productive political conversations are welcome seems necessary if we want to make political progress as a school. The Young Conservatives club is open to people of all political beliefs. We pride ourselves on being open minded, and our goal is not to progress conservatism, but to strengthen our own beliefs while learning about others. Being a conservative here at Altamont is a bit strange because our political demographics mirror Birmingham's political demographics: mostly far to the left. Although it can be difficult to find fellow conservatives, there is always room for lively political conversations which makes Altamont an incredible environment for our political clubs. Over the summer, we experienced a great deal of political turmoil, with the virus and the BLM movement, but the interesting thing about these topics is that they directly affected us and

our city as well. This means that it is especially important that we exercise our privilege of being able to discuss these issues. We should work together to come up with interesting and creative solutions to our existing problems, and the best way to do this is to work together. In our ever-divisive political climate, it is very difficult to have a productive political conversation without being dismissed or not taken seriously because of a difference of opinion. As a society that places an extreme value on our ability to have intellectual discussions, we students should do everything we can to promote an open-minded space for our discourse. We Young Conservatives are dedicated to upholding this climate of progress. We welcome any form of civil disagreement and we would all love to participate in lively political discourse as much as possible. This year our club plans to create a series of Zoom meetings with the Young Democrats to discuss political events from the upcoming election, to the recent BLM protests. We are hoping for a successful (and safe) year, and we hope to see as many students as possible in our meetings.

If you are interested in joining the Young Conservatives club feel free to contact me at JConn@altamontschool.org or our club sponsor, Mr. Dunn, at EDunn@altamontschool.org.

Athletics

How Covid Has Affected Athletics at Altamont

By Kalia Todd

The sports world has drastically changed due to the coronavirus pandemic, halting athletics for months and impacting athletes in numerous ways. Sports have always been an



outlet for me here on campus, so it was challenging for me not to have any practices during the end of the school year or over the summer. During the time away from sports, my teammates and I took advantage of our free time and exercised on Altamont's field each week. As the start of the school year was rapidly approaching, I was constantly anxious due to the uncertainty surrounding the final decision on fall

sports. I never wanted to read the emails sent out in case one informed me that there would not be an autumn season. Patience has been the key for me, helping me to undergo all of my frustrations and anxieties.

Although some practices resumed towards the end of June, we still faced many limitations. One minute there was practice, the next, there was not. The environment of volleyball practices and games have been altered completely. We no longer do the little things that mean so much to us, such as congratulating each other in a huddle or hanging out in the locker room. There are no longer fans in the stand rooting for us or parents yelling after every bad call made by the refs. Because of this, my teammates and I are learning to lean on each other for support and motivation.



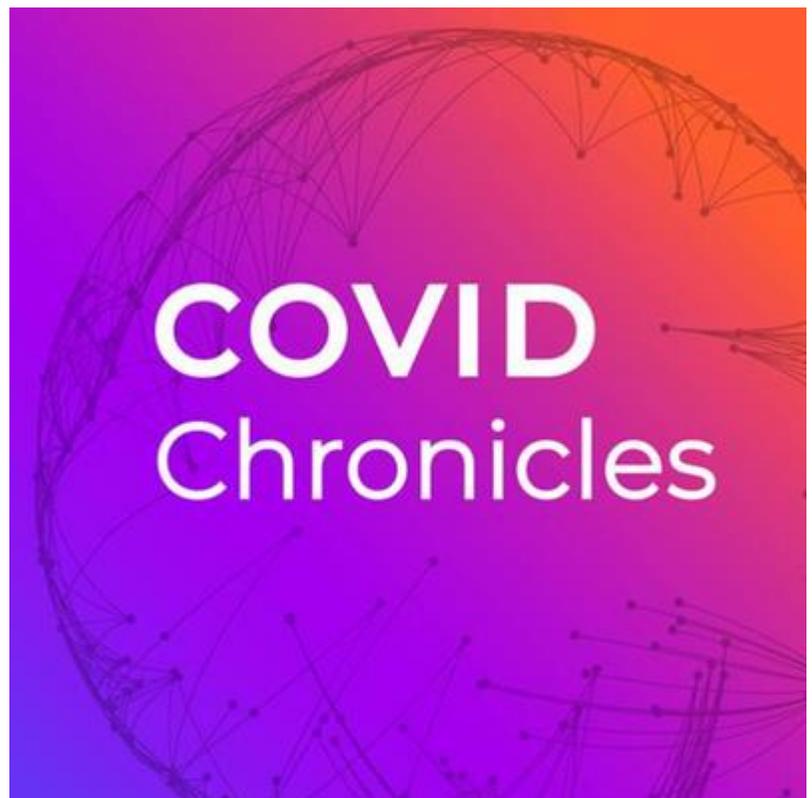
One positive outcome of COVID-19 is that it has greatly improved the volleyball team communication skills. It is hard to play in a quiet environment; therefore, we are continually talking about every serve, receive, and hit. It is difficult not knowing what the future holds for our athletic season, so I play and practice as if each day is my last on the court. Although these circumstances were not what we imagined, we are adapting and overcoming. Playing during these times can be remarkably frustrating. I have faced many setbacks from the coronavirus pandemic, but I am truly grateful to have the opportunity of this season.

Contemporary

Use Your Microphone: What Tess Vigeland's Podcast Did for Me

By Lucine Carsen

None of us could have ever imagined how quickly the coronavirus transformed from a topic mentioned in simple radio spots to a full-blown pandemic. In the middle of March 2020, Altamont switched to a virtual learning plan, a jarring transition that most students were unprepared for. Many of us felt isolated and depressed, whether that be from the lack of socialization, adventure, or toilet paper. However, families like mine now have one more thing to worry about: our relatives, the essential workers. Between all the 'covidiot's' and the 'moronavirus' carriers, cases began to spike rapidly – and still are on a sickening skyrocket towards absolute chaos. Not only is it worse for small businesses, the numbers also make it more dangerous for doctors like my mother.



Luckily, my mom is not an ER doctor, and half of her time is devoted to researching brain disorders such as Parkinson's Disease. However, she still is required to 'go on service' every other month or so and work in the hospital for a two-week period. During this time, and the two weeks after, we set up a quarantine area for her and essentially social-distanced inside our own house. I have to be honest: every time she leaves for work, I'm nervous and even terrified at times. After all, she's been exposed to multiple COVID-19 cases and had symptoms that patients with a rare but fatal strain of coronavirus had experienced as well (luckily it wasn't the 'rona in the end). I began to realize how extremely lucky I am that I still have a mother unscathed by the virus. The realization that other kids just like me have to watch their family members go off to work in COVID-19 hotspots *every single day*, no break between the two-week periods my mother works in, angered me at first. Why do we have to send off our family members to hospitals overrun with COVID-19 patients because those who disobeyed mask mandates, purposely coughed on essential workers, and held mass gatherings breaking CDC guidelines *and* state laws, have now spread the virus across the country?

But I've also learned to be grateful for all those who put their lives on the line to care for the countless numbers of the infected. I know it is hard to imagine that we could possibly be in a worse place right now, but without essential workers, American society would have completely collapsed. I wished I could figure out a way to express my gratitude, but as I don't have access to social media, I couldn't think of any way to publicly thank them until we were given a new assignment in 7th and 8th grade Creative Writing class. The instructions? In OneNote, Mr. Dan Carsen typed, "...I want you to look back on the last two or three weeks and, with your experience of this whole pandemic situation in mind, write a heartfelt letter about it ... *to anyone you want.*" So, I chose to write out my gratitude to the doctors, nurses, mail people, delivery workers, and other essential workers who deserve so much more than the nation is giving them right now. And when Tess Vigeland was searching for letters written by children and teens to feature in her podcast, *COVID Chronicles*, she contacted Mr. Carsen, her old friend in the teaching business. After several of us offered our pieces to her, Ms. Vigeland approved them and had us record ourselves reading the letters aloud.

The process itself was simple, really. Well, it was *after* I reread and edited my letter over and over and over again, highlighting and deleting and retyping. Afterwards, I went off on a journey to find a semi-quiet-ish place in the house, which is much harder than it sounds. I read my piece aloud several times to practice before I opened the voice memo app on my father's iPhone. A few tongue twisters and talking tragedies later, I finally had a good take. Soon, all the students' recordings were sent in, and all that was left to do was wait. And when the latest podcast episode was released, titled *The Kids Will Absolutely Be Alright*, I knew that, just maybe, the people who keep our society running will hear my message. Yes, I know, it sounds cheesy, but after listening to young Altamont voices out in the open, I realized that even us, the adolescent students in the middle of Alabama, can make our voices heard.

Thanks to today's technology, we are now able to express our thoughts and feelings, and even go so far as to admit that we have been angered or scared by this pandemic. Connection is key in today's day and age, and by sharing our unique experiences with the world around us, we are able to guide each other through the darkest of times. So, I encourage all of you to use the privileges you have to *help other people*. Oftentimes, kids zone out into their own worlds and forget about others, but it's crucial in this complicated moment in history

that we take out our AirPods and speak into the microphone. So what if we're too young? I sure don't want the world we live in today to be the one we stay in for the rest of our lives, and I don't think you want that either. Being featured in a podcast isn't the only way you can help, and a microphone isn't only a rod-shaped piece of metal or a gray icon on a pair of earbuds. There are so many more ways in which you can help erase the downhill spiral of a timeline that today's leaders have left for us. There are so many ways in which we can move towards a better world, but we will not reach it unless *everyone* tries.

To check out Tess Vigeland's <https://anchor.fm/tess-vigeland/episodes/The-Kids-Will-Absolutely-Be-Alright-ecn4jh>

Staying Connected During Covid



By Claudia Williams

The coronavirus pandemic has changed our lives in ways we never anticipated. It seems like every part of our lives has felt its effects, but the area that has perhaps seen the most difference is our relationships. How can we safely stay connected to our friends and family in this situation beyond

just chatting on video calls? Here are our tips.

Snail Mail.

While texting and calling are effective methods of communication, it can be nice to have a tangible reminder of that desire to connect in a world that is currently lacking. Writing out what you want to say on paper can make the message more meaningful, and it's always fun to receive a letter as well! Including small things like pressed flowers, photo printouts, and drawings helps make the letters feel more personal and add interest to plain writing.

Surprise!

One thing our lives are currently lacking are everyday surprises and unexpected moments of joy. The solution? Make them yourself! Summon your inner Stargirl and get a roll of streamers and some balloons, and then go to a friend's house and decorate! (Just maybe check with their parent ahead of time, though, to make sure it's okay.) It doesn't have to be a special occasion; any day will do! Or, if you would rather not leave your house at all, you can flamingo-a-friend (<http://birmingham.flamingofriend.com/>) or even anonymously send

them a potato with your choice of message or photo on it

(<https://www.anonymouspotato.com/> or <https://potatoparcel.com/>)!

Handmade Gifts.

A gift that someone has taken the time to make themselves is always more sentimental than something that you could buy. Have you picked up a new creative skill during quarantine? Use it! Maybe you've learned how to crochet - make a blanket or sweater so that someone can feel a warm embrace even when you aren't there to give them a hug. Or perhaps you're trying your hand at paper filigree – create a card that has a heartfelt message and doubles as artwork that the receiver can display.



Watch a TV show or read a book together.

Running out of interesting things to talk about? This is an easily remedied by sharing a great movie or story with someone. Reminisce over old favorites or dip your toe into a new series – just please, anything to talk about other than coronavirus and school!

Picnic.

One of the best ways to still meet up with close friends or extended family while still avoiding contact is to go on a distanced picnic! Choose a location that won't be crowded or go at a time when there aren't normally many visitors. Everyone brings their own blanket or chair and sets them six feet apart. And, as fall approaches, this is a great way to take advantage of the cooler weather and spend more time outdoors.

Found some inspiration? We hope so! Here are a few bonus suggestions to top it off!

- Create a time capsule. Then again, maybe you don't want to remember what this year was like.
- Have a distanced water balloon fight. They said to wash your hands, didn't they?
- Text someone you haven't spoken to in a while.

Opinion

Fact Vs. Fiction: A Reflection On Trump's Most Recent Controversial Statements

By Margaret Schedler

On Monday, August 31st,
President Donald Trump joined Laura
Ingraham on “The Ingraham



Angle”¹ to discuss recent BLM protests and pressure facing police. President Donald Trump made many questionable and controversial statements; because of this, I decided to sit down with Deputy Will Bailey from the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office, in hope of separating the statements supported by fact and those that are not.

Through the course of Donald Trump’s Fox News interview, Trump consistently referred to BLM protesters as “thugs”. I think that it is important to take a look into what the word “thug” actually means. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of “thug”² is “a violent or brutish criminal or bully.” According to a NPR transcript³ that was highlighting racial charge behind the word “thug,” some of the more famous people who have used this term when describing a group of individuals include Governor Larry Hogan (Maryland), Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake (Baltimore), President Barack Obama, and now, President Donald Trump. I asked Deputy Bailey if he believed that the word “thug” accurately described BLM protesters. His response was quite the opposite to what Donald Trump expressed in his interview. “The word ‘thugs’ is not an accurate way to describe BLM protesters,” he said. “I have not encountered protesters that would fit the description of ‘thugs.’ I have only encountered peaceful protesters.” Now, it is important to keep in mind that Deputy Bailey works out of the Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office, meaning that he might not come into contact with different groups of protesters like one might see in large cities such as Seattle. Donald Trump on the other hand has, hopefully, seen different protests proving the fact that he has witnessed many peaceful BLM protests. Then why, is the question, would he group all protesters under the description “thug” which we now know refers to a violent criminal?

Towards the middle of Donald Trump’s interview on “The Ingraham Angle,” Trump used the term “Marxist” saying, “Black Lives Matter is a Marxist organization”. When looking up the dictionary definition of “Marxist” one may find it hard to draw a line to Trump’s usage of the word. Dr. Alex Melonas, a history teacher at The Altamont School, believes that the term “Marxist” has been melted into a different meaning entirely. “‘Marxism’, ‘socialism’, ‘communism’, ‘leftism’ and ‘progressive’, in the United States today, are all conflated to mean, in effect, anything the speaker wants it to mean,” he says, suggesting that this term is used by groups usually from the right, to prove that an organization, in this case BLM, goes against the construct of American values. Dr. Melonas continues, “In other words, as we use the term in the US, ‘Marxism’ is literally meaningless”. Considering what Trump probably meant from his initial statement, I asked Deputy Bailey if he believes BLM could in fact be “a Marxist organization”. He responded frankly, “I do not believe that BLM is a Marxist organization. Protestors are crying for a change in that they are seeing members of the Black community, being shot.”

Next Laura Ingraham brought up women in relation to Trump, asking the president to give an encouraging statement to women in America. In Trump’s statement, he mentioned his opposing Democratic candidate for the 2020 Election saying, “I’m standing here in a sea of people, and we need law and order in this

¹ Fox News. (2020, September 01). President Trump joins Laura Ingraham to discuss violence in Democrat-run cities, planned visit to Kenosha. Retrieved September 10, 2020, from <https://www.foxnews.com/transcript/president-trump-joins-laura-ingraham-to-discuss-violence-in-democrat-run-cities-planned-visit-to-kenosha>

² Thug. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/thug>

³ The Racially Charged Meaning Behind The Word 'Thug'. (2015, April 30). Retrieved September 10, 2020, from <https://www.npr.org/2015/04/30/403362626/the-racially-charged-meaning-behind-the-word-thug>

country, and women see that with me. You're never going to have law and order with Biden.” I asked Deputy Bailey if he believes that Trump will bring law and order to America, if he has not already. He responded saying, “I personally don’t agree with the fact that President Trump will bring law and order, and that Joe Biden will not.” Once again, pulling out our dictionaries we can find the definition of “law and order”. Dictionary.com defines “law and order”⁴ as the “strict control of crime and repression of violence, sometimes involving the possible restriction of civil rights.” Now applying that definition to the events that we have witnessed around us; it is very easy to agree with Trump on part of his statement. Though we can’t say for sure that Joe Biden will or won’t enforce law and order in America, it is very clear to see Trump’s imprint. President Donald Trump admitted to voter suppression in early August, according to an article by *The Washington Post* which stated, “President Trump said Thursday that he does not want to fund the U.S. Postal Service because Democrats are seeking to expand mail-in voting during the coronavirus pandemic, making explicit the reason he has declined to approve \$25 billion in emergency funding for the cash-strapped agency.” *The Washington Post* reminds that Trump uses deterrents such as “voter ID requirements, limits on early voting, closing poll locations in poor areas, and purging voter rolls”⁵ to suppress Democratic and Liberal voters. Unlike before, it is easy to sketch a line from the previous definition to the actions of President Donald Trump. But as always, we must give Donald Trump the benefit of the doubt. Does he believe that the retraction of civil rights, such as voting, could better support law and order within this country, or are his actions simply a window into weak leadership strategies?

President Donald Trump touched on many debatable topics during his Fox News interview with Laura Ingraham, including a questionable comparison of “choking” during a golf tournament and missing a hole to a police officer “choking” and killing someone. With the help of Deputy Will Bailey, I was able to sift out Donald Trump’s liable statement from the rest. Deputy Bailey expressed his closing remarks, bringing our discussion to a reflective close, “Every day when I put my duty belt on, tie my boots, and place my badge on my shirt, I try my best to represent our Sheriff’s Office with honor, dignity, and respect.”

Health

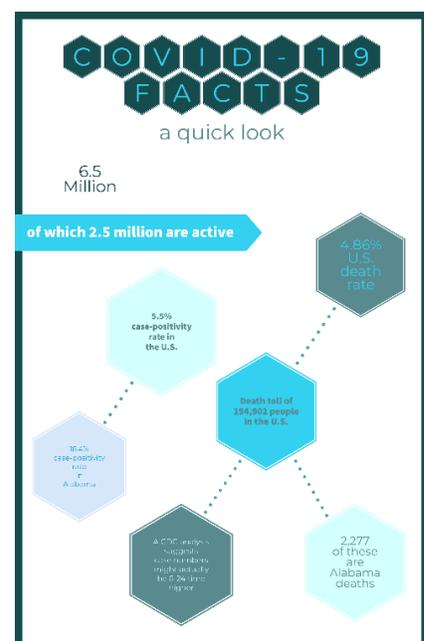
COVID-19

Key Numbers:

Accurate as of September 9, 2020

By Tyler Walley

- The United States has had 6.5 million cases (of which over 2.5 million are active).



⁴ Law and order. (n.d.). Retrieved September 10, 2020, from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/law-and-order?s=t>

⁵ Rubin, J. (2020, August 13). Opinion | Trump confesses to voter suppression. Retrieved September 10, 2020, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/08/13/trump-confesses-voter-suppression/>

- The United States has had 194,902 deaths due to COVID-19, representing a death rate of 4.86% among cases which have had an outcome.
- More Americans have died from COVID-19 than people who live in Chattanooga, Tennessee.
- However, according to a *New York Times* article from August 13, the true death toll from COVID has already exceeded 200,000, given the number of excess deaths that are not counted as COVID deaths



- According to analysis done by the CDC, the true number of cases in the United States could be 6 to 24 times the reported number.
- If we multiply the active cases by 6, the United States has 15 million cases, which is larger than the entire state of Pennsylvania. Multiplying the active cases by 24 gets us to 60 million, which is more than the entire country of South Africa.
- Alabama has had 133,606 cases and 2,277 deaths, and Jefferson County has had 17,493 cases and 312 deaths. Over 2,000 people have tested positive at the University of Alabama alone.

- The WHO has recommended that the case-positivity rate (which is the number of positive cases divided by the number of tests done) be under 5%. The United States has a 5.5% positivity rate, and Alabama's is currently 18.4%.
- These numbers are constantly changing, and it's important to stay updated with the correct sources and numbers. I've included sources and further reading below:

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Letter from The Editors



Dear Reader,

As The Altamont School opens its doors for the new school year, freshly developed anxieties arise within its halls. Our fellow students face concerns of Covid-19, five-page essays, and the uncertain future. In the school building we are separated for safety and the students who choose to learn from home, struggle to remain connected while tied to a virtual platform. Never before has a school paper been more important, as it keeps our school's strong sense of community alive even with the obvious distance apart. *The Acta Diurna* is led this year by three passionate students, Lucine Carsen, Claudia Williams, and myself, Margaret Schedler. This is my third year of learning at Altamont. I participate in many Altamont organizations including, Miree Student Advisory Board, the Miree Student Leadership Program, and of course, *The Acta Diurna* as an Editor. My favorite classes are Latin and History, and I strive to study Classics and Government at Smith College after I graduate from Altamont.

I am Claudia Williams, and this is my third year as a student at Altamont and my second experience editing for school literary works, the first being the yearly publication of the Dragon's Toe. I enjoy learning Mandarin and playing in the orchestra as the lone double reed. The most beautiful spot in the school to me is the courtyard, which is a very peaceful place to sit or eat lunch and is worth the detour on the way to class because it provides a break from the usually-bustling halls of Altamont.

My name is Lucine Carsen, and I am a rising ninth grader and co-editor of the Acta Diurna. Over the years, I have been involved in Middle School LEAD, The Dragon's Toe, middle school basketball and soccer, and miscellaneous Altamont clubs. I love to write and shoot short films with other Altamont students, play hand drums, hike and practice rock climbing, and participate in Altamont's many service opportunities. What I appreciate the most about Altamont is the open-mindedness and accepting attitudes of both the staff and the student body, as well as the true love of learning of many of my peers and I.

The Acta Diurna Editors of 2021 welcome you to the new school year!

