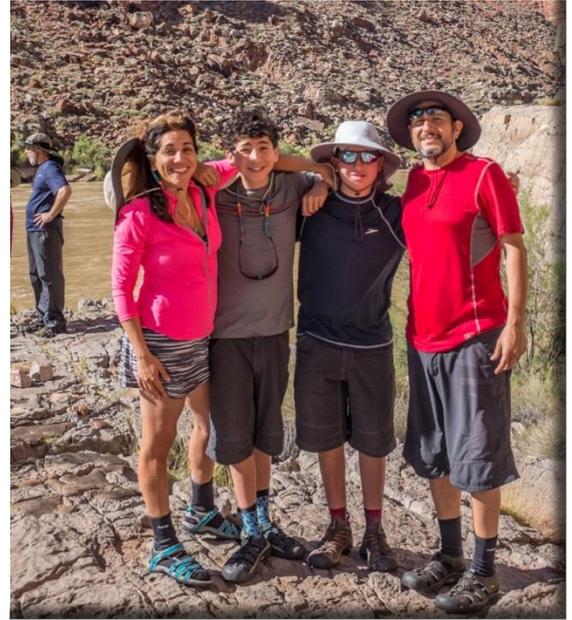




The Middle is the hardest part of anything—a hike, a book, hump day. It’s the central point between two extremes, when it feels like the end is so far, and the beginning a poignant memory. The Middle is also a turning point—think half time, act two in a play. Middle School. When early adolescent education is done well, kids have a foundation for a lifetime of well-being. The Billings Staff and Faculty recognizes the importance of this pivot. Their mission is not just to teach our kids, but to know them—sometimes better than we do; they get this stage of life, and are experts in seeing them through this central axis between childhood a young adult. So as Annual Fund Chair for 2015/16, I hope you will join me in securing Billings’ financial foundation.



My son Caetano had a great experience at his elementary school. The teachers understood his needs, loved him and communicated his trials and successes to me regularly. They nurtured him emotionally, which is what he needed most at that time. And in 5th grade, they warned me that he might not get such individualized attention at a large middle school in the years to come. That concerned me, because adolescence is a time of tremendous development, challenge and even chaos. I wanted Caetano to continue having great relationships with educators that stimulated his curiosity, to feel free to be himself while having a strong sense of community. And then, I found Billings. “We focus on the emotional development of adolescents” was the phrase from the Billings Open House that rang through my head throughout the whole admissions process.

*...when I sat down with his advisor for our conference, I learned a lot of new things about my kid. She described a fascinating side to him I didn't see day to day...*

After Caetano’s first week of 6th grade last year, at the annual Billings convocation, I sensed a big shift in our relationship. He started putting distance between us, striving for independence. Throughout the year, I was surprised to see him try so many new activities—sports, clubs, social events—with zero prodding or input from me. And when I sat down with his advisor for our conference, I learned a lot of new things about my kid. She described a fascinating side to him I didn’t see day to day, and she spoke of him so warmly. Sure, we had bumps in the road over the year, but the teachers and counselors always had great strategies for handling issues that came up. **Because they know him, they see him, and they get him.** I realize now that his confidence at this stage is helped greatly by his experience at Billings.

We want our kids, teachers and school staff to know how valued and appreciated they are. Our kids go to Billings so they can have an exceptional middle school experience. Please donate what you can so that collectively, our community can ride through this stage with the aplomb and excitement every “act two” deserves.

Sincerely,

Cristina and Forest Key (Caetano, 2017)