

# The Blue Skirt



The Brearley Middle School Newspaper

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## VI'S TRANSFORMED INTO ANCIENT ATHENIANS

By

On Tuesday, April 16, the sixth grade's special assembly focused on the hairstyles of the Caryatid (maiden) columns on the Porch of Maidens on the Acropolis in Athens. These columns were created almost 2400 years ago to hold up the roof of a portion of a temple called the Erectheion.

Each column is a statue of a maiden with one knee bent forward, standing tall, with a basket on her head and her hair long and beautifully braided. The word for "maiden" in ancient Greece is "kore" and so the six columns are referred to as "Kore A, Kore B, Kore C," and so on. Professor Katherine Schwab, an art history professor at Fairfield University in Connecticut, and Milexy Torres, a professional hair stylist, came to Brearley to show us how those sculptured hairstyles were created and why.

After Koula Sophianou, Consul General of Cyprus, spoke, Professor Schwab began the presentation by showing us slides of complex braided hairstyles of today. One of the most popular hairstyles she showed us was the fishtail braid. She said that once she began studying the Caryatids, she began to find fishtail braid patterns everywhere in ancient Greek art—on vase painting and relief sculptures of the heads of discus throwers, male athletes, and gods like Apollo and Dionysus, and on solid gold bracelets.



VI's respond to a question.



Professor Katherine Schwab

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## BREARLEY VI'S TRANSFORMED INTO ANCIENT ATHENIANS

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models the finished hairstyle.

She showed us slides of statues of men wearing fishtail braids wrapped around their heads, in contrast to the maidens, who wore them down. She also talked about the religious importance of hair in Greek culture, and the custom of cutting of a lock or braid of hair as an offering to a god. She said that women would wear their hair long, unless they were in mourning. Because the hairstyles that Miley Torres recreated work best on curly hair, both Miley and Professor Schwab believe that curly hair was dominant in ancient Greece.

In talking about ancient hairstyles Professor Schwab also showed us slides of beautiful bun cages, made out of gold, indicating that when hair wasn't braided it might be gathered up into a thick bun. Professor Schwab also reminded us that the hair products we have today did not exist in ancient Greece. Animal fat or vegetable oil might have been used, sparingly, as we use hair gel, and, while there were hair ornaments and clips, evidence suggests that most often the ancient Greeks just tied their hair up using other strands of hair.

As Professor Schwab spoke, Miley Torres began braiding the hair of the first student volunteer, in the style of  
Kore E.

Professor Schwab went on to explain how what she calls "The Caryatid Hairstyling Project" began. In 2009, the Caryatids, with the exception of Kore C, which had been taken to the British Museum in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Lord Elgin, were moved from the temple porch on the Acropolis indoors to the Acropolis Museum to protect them from further environmental erosion. They were set up in a way that allowed, for the first time, the statues to be seen from the back as well as from the front, and finally the hairstyles, intricate, beautiful, and different for each statue, could be seen. Professor Schwab had assumed that all the Caryatid hair sculpting was the same, but when she got a closer look, she saw that the hairstyles were all different.



Girls began braiding one another's hair.

## BREARLEY KORES

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Professor Schwab wanted to see if she could replicate those hairstyles and use them as a teaching tool, and she found Milexy, who attempted to recreate a Kore hairstyle on Professor Schwab's own hair. She successfully did it, even though Professor Schwab's hair was thin. The two of them decided to create a video in which they braided the hair of six girls at Fairfield University, four of whom were in Professor Schwab's Art History class. The braiding was filmed, and the video that resulted, which we at Brearley saw in our English classes, has been shown all over the world.

Once the presentation was completed, and i's hair was finished, Milexy began braiding



Milexy transforms into a Kore with elaborately braided hair.

hair.

Meanwhile, Professor Schwab and the students had a long question and answer period. One girl asked if there were things like beauty parlors? Professor Schwab said that that was a very interesting question, that women apparently did their hair at home—in fact, that girls as young as five or six were expert braiders—but that there were barber shops for men. Another girl asked whether they wore hair extensions? Professor Schwab answered that we have no proof of Greeks wearing extensions, but that the ancient Romans certainly did. Someone else asked whose hair, of the six Fairfield students who were part of the original hairstyling project, was easiest to braid? Milexy answered that the girl with long blond curly hair was easiest. It took Milexy about forty minutes to do her hair, while others required twice that amount of time.



We had a great time, and by the middle of the lecture, as you can see from one of the photographs, everyone in the room was braiding someone else's hair while listening to the lecture and watching the slides and Milexy's expert styling.

## THE HONORABLE KOULA SOPHIANOU VISITS BREARLEY

By \_\_\_\_\_

An additional feature of Professor Katherine Schwab's talk about The Caryatid Hairstyling Project was the presence of The Honorable Koula Sophianou, the Consul General of Cyprus in New York. Mrs. Sophianou graciously agreed to take time from her demanding schedule to stay after the presentation to talk with *The Blue Skirt*.

We asked her about how she had met Professor Schwab, and Mrs. Sophianou said that she and Professor Schwab became quick friends when Mrs. Sophianou attended one of Professor Schwab's lectures on ancient hairstyling. She loved the talk so much and is so engaged with the heritage of Greek culture that when she heard that Professor Schwab would be lecturing to girls at Brearley, she was eager to see how students reacted to the talk and to see the excitement of the girls when Milexy Torres did their hair.

We also asked Mrs. Sophianou about what it is like to be a diplomat. She explained that her job requires that she know many languages and travel around the world. She has worked and lived in New York City for the past three and a half years, where the focus of her work

**“Representing one's country is both a great responsibility and a great honor.”**



The Honorable Koula Sophianou

has been strengthening the relationship between The Republic of Cyprus and New York in many ways. Her job means that she goes to many events and talks about her country. She is also in contact with Consul Generals from many other countries who work in New York. When tragedies such as Hurricane Sandy occur, she is on the move finding out if someone from Cyprus has been affected, and offering assistance.

We also asked Mrs. Sophianou what a typical day as Consul General is like. She said that there is a seven-hour time difference between New York and Cyprus, and so she wakes very early to start checking her emails about world news. Her job requires lots of time and she works seven days a week. Mrs. Sophianou told us that she feels that to be representing her country is both a great responsibility and a great honor.

Then she wanted to talk a bit about Brearley and what she had seen this morning. She complimented the sixth grade on what she called our “outstanding listening skills” and “intelligent questions,” and those compliments, which we cherish, proved to us how interested she is in the education of young girls and how strongly she believes in the importance of keeping alive the studies of ancient Greece. At the end of our interview, she taught us how to say “thank you” in Greek. *The Blue Skirt* was honored to talk with her, and says thank you in return.

σας ευχαριστούμε to Koula Sophianou!