

Northfield Mount  
Hermon  
Student  
Publications

# Lamplighter

ISSUE 4

Photo by  
Benjamin  
Rosenthal '27

*FEATURED ARTICLES BY:*

Ashley Rakotoarivo  
Maggie Provencal  
Xiaotong Shen  
Emery Vitrano  
Skylar Fischer  
Michelle Tang  
Junsang Ryu  
Damon Tung  
Leah Song  
Esa Blume  
Emily Liu  
Rose Wu





# Restricting Gilder: Regression or Progression?

By ROSE WU '25, EMERY VITRANO '26, AND MAGGIE PROVENCAL '25



Photo by VITTORIA PINCI '25.

NMH, like hundreds of other schools, incorporates study halls into weeknights to provide students with time to complete their school work and seek extra help if they need it. To maximize the effectiveness of studying, upper-classmen are presented with the choice of going to various study hall locations for group or individual study. However, many students argue that during study hall, in addition to engaging with school work, they should also be able to engage with their friends. Gilder was once the ideal place on campus for students to do so, a space perfect for casual conversation and socializing that many students have said adds to the boarding school experience.

However, just before winter break, school administrators announced that Gilder would no longer be a casual study hall location for upper-classmen. As of January, students can only go to Gilder during study hall for extra-help sessions. This new policy has led to a dramatic decrease in students walking to Gilder for study hall, leaving them to work in their rooms instead. The change, aiming to help students who need academic help to work without distractions, has drawbacks for their daily lives.

The decision to remove Gilder as a study hall location was made in good faith. According to NMH's academic dean, Lori Veilleux, there were constant reports of students being chaotic and disruptive in Gilder, obstructing other students from focusing in extra help sessions, and even filming TikTok videos in the hallways of Gilder during study hall. She commented that these behaviors "align with our ideas and practices around study hall."

In comparison with all of the other study hall locations, such as the library, RAC, and dorms, Gilder was the only place with a "culture" of loud socialization instead of quiet studying. According to Kim Shearer, a dean, "There would be students that did have work to do, but they would get distracted or wouldn't be able to focus because of the noise level." With repeated reports from faculty, students, and extra-help tutors that Gilder was getting more and more disruptive, to the point where even parents

were notifying deans and teachers about the unruly nature of Gilder during study hall, NMH decided to limit Gilder exclusively to students in extra help sessions.

This decision, though saddening and frustrating to many, positively affected the overall study hall experience in Gilder. "Before, there were a lot of kids coming here for more social reasons rather than getting their work done," said Alex Baron '26. "It's been a lot more quiet, and it's been a lot easier for kids who do have work to get their work done." Many other students also reflected that they were much more productive in Gilder after it was quiet without the constant distraction of their friends. The students said they didn't want to be distracted, but the transparent walls in Gilder made it hard to ignore their friends when they were being loud or passing by. Extra help tutors and faculty report that focusing on school work and providing academic support became much easier without the chaotic background from outside the study rooms.

However, restricting Gilder may have caused unintentional negative effects on students. Many students may have gone to Gilder to see their friends, but simply being there may have made it easier for them to receive help. "If you're here and you need some help with math, then there's math help, whereas if they're in their dorm room, they're not going to make the trek," said Kyle Kretzer, a CASA proctor in Gilder. Working freely in Gilder may have also boosted productivity for some. "I simply cannot focus in my room," Avery McGowan '26 said. So, after Gilder's restrictions came into place, she said, "Now it's hard to focus anywhere."

Beyond creating a potential hurdle between students and receiving extra help, the new rule also restricts students from interacting with each other during times when they don't have sports or class. Avery McGowan '26 said, "I can't see people I would normally not see during the school day anymore. It's harder to keep in touch with those relationships now." Connecting different students is vital to our school, and limiting students' time to socialize can

pose a problem for our community.

Moreover, an anonymous faculty thought that restricting Gilder did not, and would not, teach students any long-term lessons. "If students are unable to finish their homework because they are distracted during study hall," she said, "they need to endure and learn from the consequences." The idea behind this belief is that since colleges don't have study halls or distraction-free environments, it is essential to give students more freedom to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes.

Finally, more than one dorm staff member has reported that restricting Gilder has increased the pressure on dorm faculty. For instance, an anonymous faculty from Norton has reported an increase in students socializing, using the kitchen, and hanging out in the lounge during study hall hours. This faculty member even concluded that restricting Gilder has turned the dorm "into a madhouse." The number of students who chose to remain in their dorms during study hall naturally rose after Gilder was restricted, sometimes making it harder for other students to focus. This raises the question of whether limiting access to Gilder is helping students focus or just causing more distraction in the dorms where students are now studying.

Because of these negative consequences of restricting Gilder, many students wonder if it would be possible to increase the accessibility of Gilder as a study hall location, at least somewhat. A student from Wallace who has requested to remain anonymous suggested reorganizing Gilder, where there could be quiet study space on one floor, extra help sessions on another, and CASA on the third floor. Also, like the library, faculty could also apply the "no-talking" or "quiet-studying space" to Gilder, allowing students to study there without being disruptive.

Yet after discussing this proposal with Veilleux, she replied with points that expressed the difficulty for faculty if this proposal was carried out. First, if Gilder were to be less restricted, there would have to be more faculty monitors around to ensure that it serves the purpose of a quiet study space. The problem is that all faculty are assigned their duties and workloads in May, making it challenging to move faculty around during this time of the year without overworking or inconvenience. The other choice of assigning student monitors did not seem like a good solution either because previously, student monitors in Gilder were reported to be distracted and did not fulfill their job of keeping Gilder quiet. However, many still wonder if creating a less-restricted Gilder study hall space would be possible next year.

This school year, the decision to regulate Gilder has been one of NMH's most controversial decisions among students and faculty. As the spring semester started, the once crowded, lively Gilder comprised only a few students studying on week-day nights. The enforcement of a strict "study hall culture" upon Gilder has transformed the optimum socialization space into a quiet workplace, perfect for accessing extra help without distractions, but far from ideal for making friends and building community. However, perhaps the number of students studying quietly may grow with snow melting and spring blossoming into fruition.



# Uncomfortability Is a Mode of Living for Students of Color

On February 19th, I helped lead a Black Student Union walk-out from All-School Meeting. Here's why.

By ASHLEY RAKOTOARIVO '24  
Photo by DELPHI LYRA '24



Northfield Mount Hermon is an institution that advertises pride in diversity, community and belonging. Some examples: the flags that hang around the perimeter of the dining hall, displaying the countries that students proudly represent; the 10th-grade required Diversity and Social Justice Course; the arms that wrap around one another during the school singing of Jerusalem; the persistent reminders that NMH is *special* because we were one of the first institutions to accept students who could not pay for education, students of color, and women.

Despite the school's efforts to promote diversity, however, the innate nature of a college preparatory environment — rooted in white supremacy — has a pattern of destabilizing, debilitating and disappointing Black students, along with a disturbing tendency to ignore its own instances of anti-Blackness.

As I reflect on my 4-years on the hill as a Black student, I reflect on the times when there was a call to action and the call was ignored. In February of 2022, a racialized anti-Black incident occurred, and the burden of addressing the situation fell on the leaders of the Black community. When this happened, I was in a state of complete and

---

***“In February of 2024, two years after the anti-Black incident we’d experienced during my sophomore year, an eerily identical incident occurred.”***

---

utter shock. It was early in my NMH career, and I believed that NMH was a place that was *special* and *different* because of the large smiles of the Black students on the website, brochures, flyers, banners, social media, and promotional media.

I realized that, as an institution, NMH was not interested in handling anti-Blackness (maybe it wasn't “high enough” on the list of priorities

to tackle). There were separate instances of discriminatory behavior where the institution was able to find the words to attempt to assuage the horror and pain that the community was experiencing, but in the instances of anti-Blackness, the school's response was to remove accountability from the institution.

Still, despite ignoring these cases of anti-Blackness, the institution never failed to ask the Black students to promote diversity and belonging. The Black students on the website, brochures, flyers, banners, and social media were all intentional.

NMH distances itself from its patterns of white supremacy. This is a process that is highly visible to Black students while being ignored by the school at large. Tokenization, microaggressions and stereotyping of Black students occur daily, always at the benefit of a white audience.

In February of 2024, two years after the anti-Black incident we'd experienced during my sophomore year, an eerily identical incident occurred. The response from the institution was unsatisfactory, at best. When the Black Student Union met, we decided we wanted to respond differently than we had in the past. I, for one, was at a point of complete and utter exhaustion, and I wasn't going to allow this situation to become a live classroom for the white children and adults in this community.

Uncomfortability is a mode of living for students of color, especially Black students at NMH. I wanted to show the rest of the school a fraction of the uncomfortability that we feel daily. On February 18th, 2024, the Black Student Union met and decided a walk-out would happen the very next day. We wanted to show how many Black students are affected by the complacency of the white majority in the community.

The entire Black Student Union sat in the front two rows of the chapel, dressed in all-Black. Unsurprisingly, a white staff member walked to the front of the chapel with a phone, recording the Black students sitting in the front of the chapel, as if it was second nature to tokenize Black children for promotional benefit. Then, standing before the entire school community, two representatives from the Black Student Union shared that we felt “underrepresented, underappreciated, undervalued, and under-protected.” They asked for “NMH to do better in supporting us as equal members in this community.” Following the statement, the Black Student Union walked out of the chapel.

Black Students are student leaders, artists, captains of sports teams, dominate in academic spaces, and are well-rounded community members. Removing ourselves from the chapel was to show that without Black students, Northfield Mount Hermon cannot be the school it aspires to be.

Since the walkout, I remain cautiously optimistic about the changes that will take place after my departure from NMH. My time here has been filled with tireless advocacy that I did not expect to take on, but it was a responsibility that was passed to me from Black students who have cycled through NMH. The goal of the walkout was not to highlight an acute or specific racialized moment, but to call on the institution to reevaluate its overall response to anti-Black incidents on campus. As I complete my final weeks on the hill, my deepest desire is for these events to not be forgotten. I have done — and will continue to do — work that I will not benefit from. I hope that my efforts, along with the BSU, makes our school a happier, healthier, and warmer place for Black students.



# Recalling Ross: A Spotlight on An Activist

By LEAH SONG '27

She entered the chapel sitting in a wheelchair. As soon as she started speaking, her voice was scratchy and sick. Yet by the end of Loretta J. Ross's speech, her powerful words roused the whole chapel to thunderous applause. Months after her visit to NMH, her message and her character continue to make lasting impressions on campus.

An academic and American activist who has shown great dedication to advocating for women's rights and reproductive justice, Ross was born on August 16th, 1953, in Temple, Texas. Ross was an honors student throughout high school. Part of this achievement was made because she had opportunities to explore different parts of the country, giving her various educational experiences. Military schools, in particular, provided her with the tools to boost her reading level at a rapid rate. Famously, Ross was the first to coin the term "reproductive justice," which folds in intersectionality to these bodily autonomies.

Despite her many successes, Ross also had to go through a lot of adversity. At the age of eleven, she was sexually assaulted and beaten by a stranger. Right after the tribulation, just four years later at the age of fifteen, she was raped by a relative. She became pregnant at fifteen as a result. It is utterly terrifying to imagine how it would have been for a young girl to have experienced that – not once, but twice.

"Whatever pain you get from speaking your truth will never be as hard as the pain from realizing that when the moment came, you failed to do so," she said during her speech. Her quote can apply to many NMH students because she wants students to know that it is better to be honest for your own sake. In Ross's eyes, the fear of judgment for expressing personal beliefs holds you back from being sincere to yourself.

According to Martha Neubert, Dean of Equity and Social Justice, Ross has been an activist for decades in many different formal and informal spaces. Ross began her journey as an activist when she was tear-gassed at a demonstration as a first-year student at Howard University in 1970. Currently, she is a MacArthur "Genius" Grant recipient and a professor at Smith College. In addition to teaching her classes there, she is also working on establishing an Institute for Human Rights & Democracy, an initiative that uses the UDHR framework.

Delphi Lyra '24 was excited to hear that Ross is in the process of writing a book about reproductive justice for women's rights. "I think that activism work is impactful and it is incredible that we were able to hear from her and speak to her," Lyra said.

Neubert in particular felt that Ross's speeches benefited the NMH community, especially the students. "She came to share her story with our students. I hope you learned all sorts of things about

her life, her convictions, her activism, and her joy – and that her accomplishments didn't unfold linearly or predictably," said Neubert.

Lyra also loved it when Ross talked about how fighting inequity should be fun. This particular topic stuck out to her because it's a piece of wisdom she has not heard anywhere else. Lyra was particularly attracted to Ross's work regarding "calling in, not calling out," culture. "Hearing her speak made me think critically about what I can do better in my daily life at NMH as well," she added.

There are plenty of older activists who are knowledgeable about collective rights, but who are not in tune with a younger audience. During her speech, Ross laughed, made jokes, and engaged the audience even while she covered hard topics.

"Ross also used a lot of terms that we use now, like when she talked about cancel culture and shutting cancel culture vs how it started for when she was growing up, just getting older and older," Blanton said. "I think being able to hear her talk was really helpful in connecting with people in our generation."

Lyra expressed hope that Ross's teachings could bring change to the NMH community. "Calling in culture and not calling out culture is an idea that is currently soaking into NMH," she said. "I think those ideas are planted and will keep having effects across campus culture."



Photo by CHIARA PINCI '24



# Unity in Adversity: How NMH Students Come Together to Solve Dorm Theft Through Cooperation, Not Blame

By DAMON TUNG '25

In the past few months, there have been several instances of theft in dorms, with students returning to find their belongings missing. Clothing, electronics, and colognes have all been stolen. The majority of students at NMH live in a dorm room. It is where students study, hang out with friends, sleep, and have a safe space to feel at “home.” But other than studying for class and cooking packet after packet of ramen, students tend to be out of the dorm for around six to seven hours a day; what happens when you’re not in your room? Every student in your dorm can be a potential suspect, yet no one would admit to stealing, making trusting your peers nearly impossible. As a community, how can everyone come together to uphold the standards of NMH and mitigate this matter?

A resident leader in Overtourn Dorm (Upper Tron), Henry Saito '25, provided a great perspective on how dorms can navigate this situation. He described Upper Tron as a “very close-knit brotherhood of students that uphold a very high standard of respect for one another.” When items from people’s rooms went missing, the residents came together for a group discussion instead of blaming each other, brainstorming “substantial solutions”

collectively.

This approach not only helped address the immediate issue but also created solidarity and trust amongst the residents, shining a positive light on this seemingly adverse situation.

On the other hand, Bogdan Kosolapov '24, one of the resident leaders in the freshman dorm Chan Cottage (C1), provided his own perspective on the dilemmas faced by the dorm leaders in such situations and the complex dynamics of addressing theft. “It really puts us in a complicated position where we don’t want to call people out, as assumptions should never be made without evidence, but without speaking out, the suspect may continue doing his deeds.”

Bob Felton, the Shift Leader (one who ensures everything runs smoothly during shifts in NMH’s campus safety), also offered some practical advice for students to enhance the safety of their dorm rooms. Firstly, “students should always lock their doors, even if they’re just stepping out for a short while. It’s easy to think you’ll only be gone for a minute, but that’s all it takes for someone to enter an unlocked room.” He stresses the importance of not sharing the door key with anyone outside a student’s

immediate living circle and avoiding opening the door to students from other dorms. “Additionally, it is crucial to keep valuables out of plain sight. Consider using safes for items like electronics, important documents, and personal items, and avoid putting these valuables in easily accessible drawers like the top drawer of your desk.” Finally, he highlighted the importance of staying alert for any unusual activities; the things that are often overlooked may be the most crucial. For example, if someone who isn’t a part of the dorm is seen acting suspiciously in the dorm, you can report the activity to an RL or dorm faculty. “The small things that seem out of place can be the most telling,” he said.

Addressing the issue of dorm theft at NMH has encouraged a collective spirit of joining together in adversity. The reactions, as seen in residents in Upper Tron, show the significance of collaboration and problem-solving rather than assigning blame. This joint effort aims to improve solidarity within dorms and uphold the standards of NMH. As a community, students need to promote mutual support and alertness to ensure a secure and hospitable environment for our student body.

---

## Security Concerns Become Clear after NMH Lockdown Drill

By MAGGIE PROVENCAL '25

On November 9, 2023, mid-way through A-block, students’ phones went off with an alert. The message notified students and teachers of a lockdown that was taking place and told the community to move to a safe location. Many students crouched under desks and away from the windows. During the drill, students tried their best to follow the guidelines of a safety video shared by security during a Monday morning meeting earlier that week. However, students only had a few minutes to do this because phone notifications went off again to release them back to their dorms—before they could fully settle into the drill. One teacher observed that students were notified to leave while teachers were left in the dark. An anonymous student was critical of the November drill, describing it as an “unnecessary experience that did not seem to prepare us for a real-life situation.

“There was a minor glitch,” said Andrew Sellers, the safety training administrator at NMH. “Our officers were trying something new. They were trying to activate the siren from their phones, which ended up working, but it caused a minor delay.” This information was not shared to the NMH community, but still it is important to know that the November drill was actually standard length. “Generally, [lockdown drills are] supposed to be about 10 minutes long,” Sellers said.

Lockdown drills have become more frequent throughout the United States as school shootings have increased. Because of this fear, many schools

have made these drills a part of regular school protocols.

Avery McGowan '26 attended a private school in Dallas, Texas before coming to NMH this year. “[Lockdown drills] took place at least once every two/three months,” McGowan said. She compared her previous school’s lockdown drills with NMH’s, saying they were “completely different.” Unlike the quick ten-minute drill we had at NMH this past November, the drills at McGowan’s previous school involved leaving the building she was in to go to a more secure location.

The point of these drills is to teach the NMH community to respond quickly to threats. And although NMH is isolated on a rural campus, this presents safety issues in itself. Hadleigh Weber, a new teacher at NMH, said that “[NMH being in a secluded area] makes it so that we don’t talk about lockdowns or active threat situations. We didn’t do our first lockdown drill until November.” Weber has experience working with police officers, police associations, and universities, specifically the University of New Hampshire, on the issue of lockdown drills and threat preparedness. Her insights about our drill put into perspective some of the safety concerns of NMH buildings. “Campus buildings always stay unlocked,” Weber said. Some NMH community members view this as creating an unsafe environment for our glass buildings in particular, which make students visible targets for intruders. Although the buildings are normally unlocked

during the day, Sellers say that “Officers can make it so nobody can get into a building and leave unless they have a keycard,” which provides an added layer of security on our campus.

Sofia Tiapkina '24, who is Ukrainian, has vastly differing experiences with lockdown drills than what many American students have become accustomed to. She did not experience these drills before coming to NMH in her sophomore year. Although they were new experiences for her, she did expect them. Tiapkina said, “I read about and watched some movies about your [American] high schools, and it seemed like the issue [to be] aware of: what it’s like to have an intruder in the school. It is a fairly widespread experience for American schools.”

These drills occur frequently throughout American schools. Comparing NMH’s policies to other equivalent schools, Sellers said,

“I think they align pretty closely with other schools.” Still, because we are a rural campus, some security is compromised. “I think at the end of the day we probably don’t have as many safety officers as we would if we were a college campus,” Sellers said. They have entire teams of people, but we do provide 24/7 coverage.” Despite the secludedness of our campus, NMH security assures us that they continue to assess the security on our campus to ensure safety in the case of a threat. “We’re constantly evaluating where we can make improvements for safety and security,” Sellers said.



# I Think I Like This Little Life ...

What is the NMH community grateful for?

By ESA BLUME '25

What do you like about your little life? This question has been circulating on TikTok after a sound went viral of singer/songwriter Cordelia singing a portion of her song "Little Life." In the song, she sings, "I think I like this little life." People started posting clips of their lives and small glimpses of what they do every day. There are many things to be grateful for on campus and here are a few of them!

Ava Reitz-Bouren '25, a Resident Leader in C4 said, "I love being a Resident Leader. I have a good relationship with the other RLs and like being able to help the freshman. I feel like a big sister to them."



Photo by ESA BLUME '25.

Grace Bird '25 is a junior who lives in Mackinnon Dorm and is a three-sport varsity athlete. Going down to the gym and seeing the sunrise is how she starts most days. "I like sunrises," she said, "I like to get up in the morning and go to the gym and often when I'm walking down there the sun starts to rise and I really like the colors and how they look with the chapel." Although getting up early can be a struggle, Bird is motivated by achieving "mini accomplishments" like exercising in the morning before class to start the day off strong.



Photo by ESA BLUME '25.

Hadleigh Weber is a religion teacher who lives in Hayden and she said, "One of my favorite daily activities is going on my morning walk with Munchie. He does a big stretch and then we go on a slow walk around Hayden."



Photo by ESA BLUME '25.

Alexis Arcaro is a librarian at Schauffler Library and to start every day, she makes herself a cup of coffee. She said, "The simple thing that I do every day that I love is have my first sip of coffee in the morning! I look forward to it the moment I wake up."



Photo by ALEXIS ARCARO '25.



Photo from NMH Directory.

Ted Kenyon is a U.S. History teacher and the boys JV hockey coach. "Here I am right after hockey practice relaxing in my favorite chair and drinking my tea before heading to bed," he said and mentions that Twinings black tea is his favorite.



Photo by ESA BLUME '25.



# Desk Profile: Sophie Cao

By XIAOTONG SHEN '25  
Photo by XIAOTONG SHEN '25.

*Navigating success and loneliness  
through community.*

Sophie loves swimming. But when swimming gets hard, she thinks of Julia.

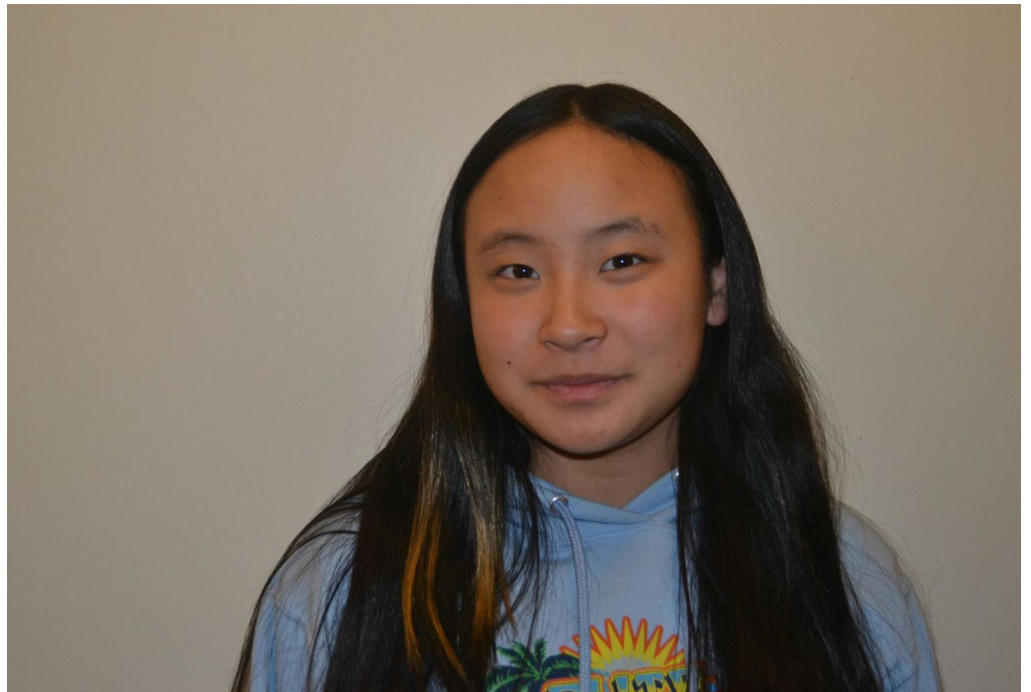
It's Sophie's first year at boarding school. She's 14, coming out of middle school, and living away from home for the first time. Like many others, she struggles with self-identity, loneliness, and understanding success. But for her, it's all about community.

The space over Sophie's desk is flooded with photos and sticky notes. One photo shows her winning a race. She stands on the podium with friends, holding a rubber duckie. Those were the "awards" of the swim meet. She found it funny.

Before coming to NMH, Sophie knew Emily Liu in her 6th grade classroom. It just so happened that they turned out to be roommates at NMH as well. Her roommate is one stone of stability in this volatile environment. Her family is another. On move in day, both Emily and Sophie's little sisters drew sticky notes for them. Sophie keeps them on her wall to this day.

"I'm the type of person who works hard, but almost never does my work actually pay off," Sophie says. Since coming to NMH, she hasn't made a single PR (personal record). In club swimming, a sport where success is quantified in milliseconds of precision, times are all that matters. That's why this result has been devastating for Sophie. No PRs means no documentation of growth. No documentation means an erasure of her efforts.

However, high school swimming is different.



It's less an individual competition, more of a team sport. For every bad time Sophie gets in a meet, another teammate can pay it off; for every point that she loses, another teammate can win it right back. "You're doing this for yourself, but you're also doing it for the team," she says. This distinction makes all the difference. It's no longer about wrangling the clock for another best time, but giving it your all so that at the end of the race, your teammates's cheers and screams are unwasted.

She is best friends with captain Julia Goh '24. Julia is a spiritual and physical leader on the team. During the training trip, she wrote up practices late at night, collaborating with coaches and alumni Tony Huang '22, and then led it the next morning.

As a teammate, she knows how much everyone is capable of, and will hold them accountable for it. For Sophie, Julia's the only one she allows to yell at her.

Sophie keeps two blocks on her desk, reading *Always and Forever*, and *Always have faith, always believe*. "I just tell myself, one day you're going to get what you deserve. I just try to live by that as long as I can to try to hang on and not give up."

For Sophie, it's about forgiving her past, and locking her faith into a newfound love and future.

Sophie raced an incredible 100 free at the meet against Loomis. As soon as she got out of the water, she hugged Julia.

"You're the best," she said, out of breath.





# Fact or Fiction: Was Our Dining Hall Furniture Made By People in Prison?

By JUNSANG RYU '27

The one thing that the entire Northfield Mount Hermon School community has in common is the time we spend in the dining hall each and every day. The dining hall is far more than a place to eat – it creates a vibrant social atmosphere where lifelong connections can be fostered. So I was a bit surprised when Pete Masteller, my religious studies and philosophy teacher, told the class that the furniture in the dining hall may have been built by incarcerated people. Although he didn't know where he had first heard this information, the supposed reason for this was to reduce the production price of the furniture.

It felt strange thinking about the chairs and tables I sat at being made by people in prison. Yet, simultaneously, it was also fascinating to think about the rumor itself. Was it true? I desperately wanted to discover more.

I first started by reaching out to Randy Miller, the operations manager at NMH. It turns out that he didn't know anything about the rumor.

I then contacted Rich Messer, the director of dining services at NMH. And this time, I saw hope, as he shared, "I, too, have heard this story of our tables and chairs." However, Messer did not have any further information to provide me with and made a note of saying that it was also unclear where he had heard about this possibility. He suggested that I reach out to Peter Weis, the NMH archivist.

Weis has been a part of the NMH community for almost 25 years, and it was clear that if anyone knew about this rumor, it would be him. He told me to come visit his office later in the day.

His office was so silent that I could hear the sound of the water flowing through the drains. There were no windows, and the small lamp soothingly illuminated his desk where there were piles of books that seemed to record various moments in NMH's

history.

After I asked about the furniture, Weis went to a space that was secluded from the rest of the room. He soon came back with a stack of papers in his hand. "The answer to your question is probably somewhere in this pile," he said as he began to sift through the heap, one by one.

The answer was nothing short of unexpected. The chairs and tables weren't purchased from a prison. At first, I was disappointed that the rumor of the prisoners wasn't true. However, what I learned turned out to be even more interesting.

In December 1903, the members of the Mount Hermon School decided upon a very important topic – the construction of a new dining hall. The original size of the building would be doubled and this space would easily allow the seating of 1000 students (an additional 530 seats from the original 470). Students were called upon to the chapel to decide what the new dining hall would be named and in the end, they agreed to call it the "West Hall."

After its construction, the school made a purchase of 500 "Solid Oak Chairs" from Forbes & Wallace in November of 1909. Each chair cost three dollars, the equivalent of a hundred dollars each, and fifty-thousand dollars total, in today's currency.

Forbes & Wallace was a department store located in Springfield, Massachusetts. It opened in 1874 but went out of business in 1976. Its products were primarily clothing, footwear, bedding, and furniture.

An excerpt from *The Mount Hermon Alumni Quarterly* written in the year of the construction of the new dining hall describes the building as "built for the distant future." Sure enough, it is evident that this goal has been achieved, as all of the chairs and tables in the dining hall are the very same ones from the year 1909. Ever since their purchase, they have

never been replaced. It is truly remarkable that they have not only survived over a century but also are stable and well-functioning even to this day.

While the answer to my question was not something that I was expecting and perhaps even hoping for, the discoveries were still immensely exciting. It is amazing to think about how we are sitting at the same tables and chairs students from a hundred years ago have sat at. Many things have changed within these hundred years, including our student culture; people of diverse clothing and backgrounds have sat on these chairs over the years. It is certainly important that we appreciate the rich history of this long-standing furniture and the value of the space itself. As Weis shares, "It is important to pay attention to the space and everyday objects here at NMH. It may appear insignificant but who knows what wonderful history it holds!"

Now, back to the question. Was the dining hall furniture made by those in prison?

"Although it says that we bought the furniture from Forbes & Wallace, I can't say with certainty that the rumor is completely false," said Weis. "The tables could still be manufactured by those in prison and then were just sold by Forbes & Wallace."

"I hope I haven't been spreading a false rumor about incarcerated people making the furniture in our dining hall," said Masteller. "I wonder if it was just a rumor or if there is some truth there that we will never know. I will probably stop sharing this in class because I can't verify the source."

But he then went on to make an important point. "It also haunts me a little. We are on this elite island of privilege, yet our privilege may be built on other people's suffering. Did the hands that made my chair get paid a living wage? I wonder."



Photo by NMH ARCHIVES.



# The House on Stonecutter Road: Norton Cottage

By EMILY LIU '27

It's a Friday night, and the house on the corner of Stonecutter Road is bustling with a s'mores night. Less than a year ago, with renovations starting in the middle of winter, this group of girls wasn't even sure if they had a dorm to live in the following fall. Now, the renovated Norton Cottage is home to 26 boarding students.

Norton Cottage has been the home to many departments over the years. According to NMH archivist Peter Weis, the original Norton house is the second oldest faculty house on campus, originally built in 1894. Between 2006 and 2009, when everyone was transitioning from the Northfield campus to the Mount Hermon campus, Norton Cottage served as the admissions building until Bolger House was built in 2009. Advancements, the department that organizes fundraisers and gift-giving, moved into Norton shortly after admissions moved to Bolger. In the winter of 2023, renovations started in Norton to turn it into a dorm.

"People told us that it might not be ready so we [would've] had to live in Ridge. By the end of [the previous school] year, there was only one room [renovated]," said Norton resident Anna Lazorina '26. Luckily, the dorm was ready for students to move in at the start of the school year. Advancements then moved into the old dorm Ridge, which previously housed upperclassmen girls. Ironically, many previous residents of Ridge moved into Norton.

Dorm head Loubna Boumghait explained the new additions to the Norton Cottage, which has been renovated to become a dorm. "They added an entirely new building. We have four new dorm rooms, a huge bathroom with showers on each floor, and my entire apartment. Everything was repainted, too."

The four new dorm rooms are also air-conditioned. A new kitchen was installed in the original Norton house. A new feature that Norton

residents especially love is the study room. Lazorina says, "During study hall, people don't just sit in their rooms. We have this common room, and almost everyone's just coming to work together". Boumghait also noted, "It's a perfect place [to study] if you don't want to go Gilder or the library because it's too far." The renovations also ensured visitors were comfortable in the dorm. A lift was installed for those with physical disabilities, and all-gender showers and bathrooms were installed, a feature that all other dorms on campus lack but which is a testament to NMH's commitment to creating more inclusive living environments.

There's a misconception that the distance from Norton to the academic buildings puts students living in the dorm at a disadvantage. Still, Lazorina commented, "The major thing when I was look-

ing for [in a dorm] was the people. [The location] wasn't the major thing I was looking for in a dorm."

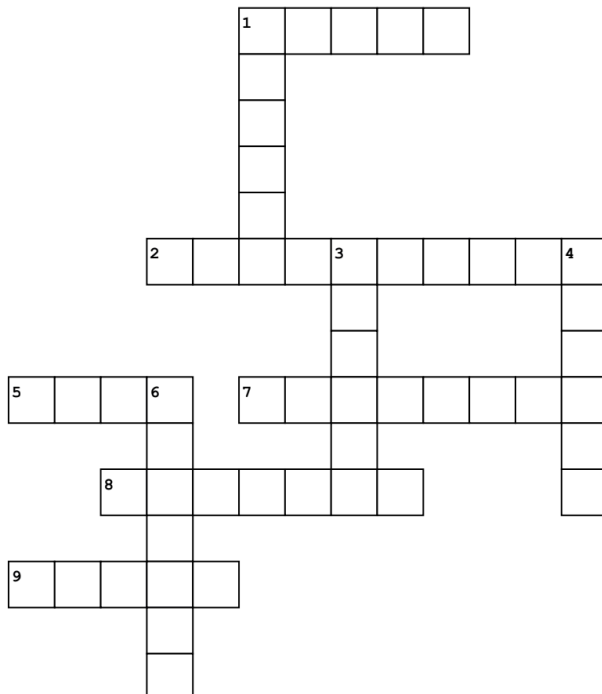
When residents were asked to describe the Norton dorm culture, one word kept coming up: homey. "[Even] if you live 10 minutes from here or 10 hours away, we just want everyone to have a happy experience", commented Boumghait. "We are a whole," said Norton resident Aimee Xiong '25. "You'll always find somebody there to help you if you're hungry."

Overall, students are happy with the new renovations. "Norton is a new dorm and it's nice. The rooms are big and all the infrastructure is new." Boumghait said, "I think the students are happier that the school is investing in the campus. And I think [students] are looking forward to what's coming in the future and making them happier and more appreciative."



Photo by CHIARA PINCI '24.

## Spring Things!



### Across

1. Punishment for not wearing green on Saint Patrick's Day
2. Yellow spring weeds
5. Most common pollinator
7. Flat ball spring sport
8. Spring \_\_\_\_\_, a common phrase for March daylight saving time
9. Sign starting of the zodiac calendar in March

### Down

1. Spring allergen
3. Holiday which shares its name with an island
4. \_\_\_\_\_ sky, the spring play
6. April \_\_\_\_\_ brings May flowers



# Finding Flow

By SKLAR FISCHER '24

Time fades away entirely as the rest of the world becomes irrelevant, and all feelings of self-consciousness and inhibition melt away; this immersive experience is often referred to as a flow state. While this state is accessible to everyone, it is also a somewhat elusive concept for many. Those who typically experience flow more frequently are people who have a passion they enjoy and practice regularly.

Acting freely for the sake of the action itself rather than for extrinsic motives is what gives us a greater sense of purpose, as claimed by the “Father of Flow”, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. His popular 1990 book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* introduces the notion that flow states are autotelic experiences. He describes flow states as an “optimal experience” because they are intrinsically rewarding and characterized by immense joy. As Csikszentmihalyi wrote, “The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something we make happen.”

However, the constant, ever-increasing overstimulation that society is exposed to has substantially diminished people’s ability to remain focused on one task for extended periods. Flow states are the most profound form of attention humans can experience, but they have become increasingly difficult to attain. So, how do we enter the flow state? To answer this question, three NMH faculty members have shared how they reach their flow state.

Religion teacher and current student at the University of Pennsylvania, Nithya Prakash, accesses her flow state by writing things that make her happy while challenging her. There is a notable difference in the “quality” of her flow state when she writes about something she is passionate about versus something she is required to write about. She stated that she has to take more breaks that disrupt her flow when writing something less exciting. Primary source research and analysis is Prakash’s most exciting type of writing; she refers to it as her “bread and butter,” her “fuel.” While working on her master’s at



Photo by VITTORIA PINCI '25.



Photo by VITTORIA PINCI '25.

Tufts University, she relied on primary sources and original claims, which were the optimal catalysts for reaching her flow state.

Prakash’s writing style is the main factor in her ability to enter flow. The second most important facet is the environment in which she writes. As long as she has music playing, it’s late at night, and she is writing something challenging, she can slip into the flow state. “It feels like things are flowing up from inside of my mind, and I don’t have to do much... It just kind of does,” Prakash explains.

On the other hand, Bill Roberts, a Visual Arts teacher at NMH, takes a very different approach to entering the flow state. For Roberts, taking a brief step back from his work to observe it is an integral part of his flow state. Like Prakash, the environment in which Roberts works also facilitates the flow state. In fact, for him, a significant aspect of art is exploring spaces; adventuring to search for something to paint is the initial stage of his flow state process. Roberts prefers to paint from life, and his favorite type of painting is to work outside en plein-air in an “alla prima” approach, which means doing the entire painting in one go. He described this type of painting as “a very rich experience – standing in the outdoors immersed in the painting process as you feel the sun on your face. Everything is in motion; the clouds are moving, the wind is moving. It just charges you.”

One would think that standing in the fields for hours at a time would be quite draining, but Roberts explains that “painting plein-air gives me more energy than it takes away - it’s addictive in a good way.” This approach to painting can be difficult because you are required to move at a quick pace before the light in the landscape transitions. However, similar to Prakash, this sense of challenge is essential to Roberts, pushing him to be bolder with his work. “If you are fully engaged,” Roberts says, “it’s because you are challenged by that activity.” This temporal urgency keeps Roberts so engrossed in his artwork that he only pulls away when his body reminds him to. “I’ve gotten some pretty bad sunburns in the past painting outside,” Roberts remarks.

For Christina Leonelli, an avid soccer player and the assistant director of admissions at NMH, flow state starts before the game begins. Spending the time to warm up is a crucial first step to accessing her flow state; without it, starting a game feels “too abrupt,” she says. It helps her shift her mind and

body to focus on one task and let go of distracting thoughts. Leonelli states, “I know I’m in a flow state when my mind is blank. I enter a subconscious state where I’m no longer thinking about tactical things.”

The “quality” of her flow has improved drastically since high school due to one crucial mental shift she has made. In high school, Leonelli felt like she was rarely in the flow state when playing soccer because she overthought her performance. Since then, she has trained herself to feel less pressure associated with the game, ultimately improving her play. She now recognizes the difference between having the responsibility to do her best versus feeling the pressure to do the best. Becoming a more confident player has helped her develop her flow state and exceed her limitations on the field.

Many people think one must be able to relax to achieve a flow state. However, the author of *Stolen Focus*, Johann Hari, determined through his research as a journalist that flow states require unyielding attention and challenge us to expand our limits. The insights from these three faculty members revealed three crucial components of the flow state that align with Hari’s conclusions.

To tap into the flow state, it is important that you are resolved in your pursuit of a singular goal; you must be able to monotask while working towards that goal. Secondly, this goal needs to have meaning and purpose for you, because it is difficult to stay focused for long periods on something that lacks meaning. Most importantly, the endeavor should challenge you; it should be just at the edge of your abilities - not beyond them. If these three conditions are met, then a flow state is more than likely to occur.

In a culture where our ability to focus has been obstructed by surface-level stimuli, flow states allow us to gain great satisfaction from tapping into a deep level of focus for long periods. In Csikszentmihalyi’s book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, he writes, “When we choose a goal and invest ourselves in it to the limits of concentration, whatever we do will be enjoyable. And once we have tasted this joy, we will redouble our efforts to taste it again. This is the way the self grows.” Consider the meaningful projects and activities in your life - whether it be in academics, sports, the arts, or anything else - and which ones have the potential to nurture a strong sense of fulfillment through intrinsically rewarding challenges.



# Statehouse Lobbying: NMH students advocate for change

By MICHELLE TANG '26

“What do we want? Climate Justice!” Collective shouts shot across the sky. As more than a hundred youths rallied on Massachusetts Avenue and marched towards the statehouse, their eyes shone with determination to demand a greener future.

It was January 31st, a week before the “joint rule ten” deadline, by which proposed bills addressing climate change would be dead. An hour before the rally, at Old West Church, nearly two hundred high school and university students across MA assembled, including seven NMH Ecoleaders and ten members of NMH Climate Justice Coalition, a club run by Ecoleaders. Participants from different backgrounds came here for the same purpose: to appeal to their legislators for support on the Priority Bills. These Bills, ranging from the “Provide ‘Sunlight’ to State Government” Act to the “Indoor/Outdoor Air Quality Act,” address environmental justice inequities and must be voted out of their assigned committees to continue on the path to law. The youth leaders from Massachusetts Youth Climate Coalition (MYCC), who had been planning this event for months, said, “the Massachusetts legislature just left its least productive session in years. We need to remind our legislators to do their jobs.”

In the church, nervousness spread among the students as the time for in-person legislator meetings approached. They gathered in small groups, discussing the bills and confirming their roles in the meeting. “The adults don’t have any votes or say in terms of how things are run,” says Payton Bonang '24, an NMH Ecoleader. Students were preparing for the event independently, taking on effective leadership and responsibilities.

On the march to the statehouse, participants rallied as hundreds of voices united into one: “No more gas! No more Oil! Keep our carbon in the cycle!” The shoutings of the unified community evoked a sense of community resonance, infecting even passersby on the street.

“It made me feel confident and empowered,” said Amy Vongvasin '25, an NMH Ecoleader and first-time lobbyist. The rally hyped her up for the upcoming meeting with the legislators. “[Compared to the] passive style of climate action where you encourage sustainability and educate people [at school], it’s like finally something I could do that would actually have a political impact,” she adds.

“Environmental movements usually focus a lot on individuals’ efforts to recycle and save energy,” said Pete Sniffen, the sustainability coordinator and an environmental science teacher at NMH who accompanied the students to the event. “However, only recently in the last five years have there been more attention paid to ‘big systematic change.’” He urges that when it comes to sustainability, it’s essential to turn off your lights and take shorter showers. Still, it’s equally important to be engaged in community, politics, policy, and democracy to push for structural change, which is precisely why NMH students and other participants were here that day.

The moment finally came. The students entered the Massachusetts Statehouse, and within the following three hours, they attended more than forty in-person legislator meetings. “This is one of the only places where I think students get to see that bigger system,” said Sniffen. “I hope students will gain from this a sense of personal empowerment

and an idea of how politics works.”

Vongvasin and Bonang, the latter of whom is a Massachusetts constituent, described their meetings with the legislators as “chill.” Bonang described the legislator-constituent dynamic that plays into this experience, which, as Vongvasin mentioned, both hold power over each other: the legislators make laws, but the constituents decide the votes. “I think [their job] is just looking out for the well-being of their constituents, because their job is supposed to be working for their constituents and being interested in what they are interested in,” added Bonang.

Interestingly, the conversation with the legislators regarding their lack of sustainable efforts differed from a confrontation. On the contrary, it facilitated understanding from the students’ side. “There are a lot of facts to consider when it comes to making policies, and it is important to establish priorities,” said Wilson Cheung '24, an Ecoleader. Bonang agrees. “It can be easy to just be pointing fingers or being mad, but when you actually have conversations with them, you get to understand their point of view and that people do things for a reason,” he says.

In their first lobbying experience, the NMH students were surprised by the strong sense of personal empowerment as they actively engaged in democracy. “It’s a really depressing world to live in if you don’t believe in the power of yourself,” said Sniffen. “My hope and dream is that this is just the first step in a snowballing effect of feeling like people

can make a difference. In fact, whether or not you care about the environment as [a] part of that Lobby Day is minor compared to the experience of being an agent of change.”

Still, a question looms on everyone’s mind: will this truly impact the legislators? In response to the concern, Vongvasin said: “Even if our senators didn’t really listen to us, it’s still a powerful experience that people from different schools came together, that we got the chance to learn about these bills.” She firmly believes that the event was encouraging and inspiring regardless of its impact on the legislature. “It makes a social and emotional impact, if not a political one.”

“I really wish students would try to pick up that energy [of advocacy] around the social life of NMH,” added Sniffen. He urges the NMH community to realize that advocacy takes time and energy and involves leadership and risk. “These things don’t just happen by themselves,” he said, “but require a lot of work in advance. It’s the power of community and effective leadership.”

As youth power spreads across MA, the lessons and takeaways of the lobbying linger in many people’s hearts and minds. Years later, the lawmakers of Massachusetts will remember a group of young people who marched through the street, exclaiming with indignance and pride: “One, we are the people; two, we love each other; and three, we will not let you wreck our planet!”



Photo by a Friendly Stranger.





# Lamplighter

## Our Team

### Writers:

Esa Blume  
Izzy Cadena  
Maggie Provencal  
Rose Wu  
Emery Vitrano  
Mackenzie Hartnell  
Emily Liu  
George Ning  
Anna Lazorina  
Leah Song  
Michelle Tang  
Ellie Kim '27  
Kimberly Chen  
Isabel Hunt  
Sarah Park  
Skylar Fischer

### Photographers:

Mohavi Thakur  
Yoona Jung  
Vittoria Pinci

### Editors:

Alexandra Tse  
Jessica Zhang  
Soren Anderson-Flynn  
Grace Bird  
Anna Brenner  
Ellie Kim '25  
Ian Lee  
Delphi Lyra  
Margaux Moos  
Chiara Pinci  
Ashley Rakotoarivo  
Xiaotong Shen  
Jessi Shin

### Digital:

Tiffany Castruita  
Yujin Kim  
Max Landrey  
Amayah Snyder  
Sumire Sumi  
Tidiane Thiam

### Layout:

Woojin Choi  
Fiona Cutchins  
Fabien Fordwor  
Cecilia Gong  
Cherry Liu  
Riley Newport  
Ivan O  
Leo Piamthipmanus  
Amy Vongvasin

### Breaking News:

Lanie Blanton  
Ella Blecher  
Maggie Cao  
Ryan Choi  
Isa Hunt  
Eliza Krotinger  
George Ning  
Henry Saito  
Max Wang  
Gus Wilson  
Serafina Wilson  
Crystal(Xiwen) Zheng