For Becky Long, MICDS Upper School Band Director, a life in music was destined, set in place even before she was born.

Her mother, a talented singer and flutist, fell in love with her father, an Air Force musician, as she watched him play a grand piano. At the age of six, Long began her own musical life by taking piano lessons from a French opera singer.

Long’s love of music started with the piano, but in 4th grade, she picked up her mother’s old flute and took to marching around her small Illinois town’s streets with her school bandmates during practice on summer mornings. At 12 years old, inspired by a strong female band director, Long decided to become a band teacher. She played flute freshman year in the intensely competitive marching band at her local Catholic high school.
school and watched a committed percussion teacher work with the school’s state champion drumline program. “It took me five minutes to see how much fun they had and say, ‘I have to do that.’” She added percussion to her repertoire and music continued to fill her days.

After high school, she studied music education at Illinois Wesleyan University where she was selected for top ensembles as a percussionist. Wesleyan also gave her the opportunity to start doing what she loved: teach music.

After graduating, a solid network combined with being in the right place at the right time led to more opportunities: She directed school choirs and bands, tutored privately and served as a church choir director. The University of Illinois—her first choice when she looked at colleges in high school—offered her full tuition remission for a master’s program. She taught music at her high school alma mater while completing her masters over three summers.

Throughout her journey, Long recognized the support her parents provided, and how important that was to her success as a student. She vowed to pass that support on to her future students.

She came to know MICDS while working as an education representative for the local branch of an instrument shop. For Long, the School felt like home from the very beginning, and she saw immediately how her talent and experience might benefit the band program. She says that MICDS offers a global view of music, where it is and how it is today, and she credits Middle School Band Director Josh Baumgartner’s support and enthusiasm for developing a strong vision for the MICDS band program.

Ultimately, she’s striving to create a warm community within the MICDS band program. “I want to show students what they are capable of doing with music, and what it can do for their lives,” she said. “If I can teach students how to practice, they can take that experience to their other classes. Or maybe they’ll struggle to play a hard piece and learn about grit, and that lesson on perseverance will transfer to other parts of their life,” she said. She gives departing seniors copies of the children’s book Mole Music when they graduate, including a handwritten note inside the cover. The book is a reminder of how you can affect the world even when you don’t realize it.

Long’s family is still her biggest supporter in her musical life today. Her father and her husband pitch in with the pep band and help out at MICDS concerts. Her mother is often in the audience, encouraging Long’s sons Jace and Grayson, a new Ram this year, to appreciate the music their mother inspires from student musicians. Long’s band family extends to include friends, students and colleagues, so whether she’s at home jamming with her husband and dad or conducting the Upper School Winter Band Concert, she’s always among family.

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BECKY LONG
Upper School Band Director

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