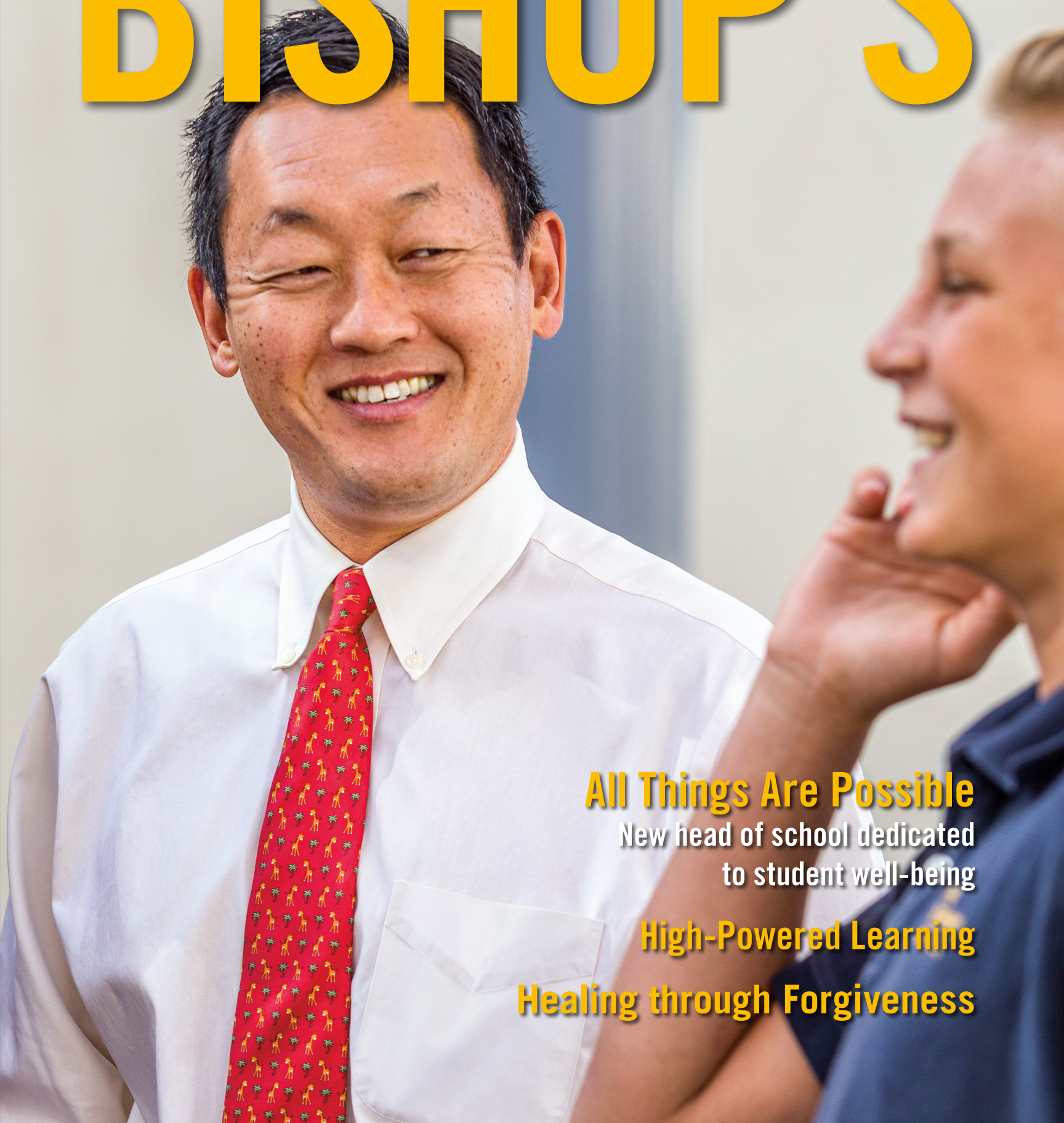


A MAGAZINE FOR THE BISHOP'S SCHOOL FAMILY AND FRIENDS FALL/WINTER 2019

BISHOP'S



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Healing through Forgiveness



Healing through Forgiveness

By Joe Tash

Murder victim's father espouses non-violence and making peace, even with his son's killer.

Over the past 24 years, since the terrible day his only son was murdered, Azim Khamisa has spoken before hundreds of groups all over the world. As he urges his audience to forswear hate, violence and revenge for peace, love and compassion, one thing stands out above all else—his forgiveness for the teenager who fired the fatal bullet.

While many have marveled over the years at Mr. Khamisa's willingness to extend a hand of friendship to the killer, it makes perfect sense to him.

"Unless you forgive, you remain a victim. Forgiveness is something you do for yourself," said Mr. Khamisa at an all-school assembly at The Bishop's School in November.

Mr. Khamisa came to the School as part of the Woltman Lecture Series. He gave two talks: one in the evening for the community and one for students, faculty and staff. The lecture series was established in 2018 through a gift from Richard Woltman and his family, longtime Bishop's supporters who wanted to bring speakers who embody the School's core values of kindness, humility and justice.

At the all-school assembly, Mr. Khamisa, 70, began by showing a video that included news footage about the murder of his son, Tariq, a 20-year-old student at San Diego State University. On the day of the murder in 1995, Tariq was working at his job as a pizza deliveryman for a local Italian restaurant.

Four teenage gang members called in an order for a pizza, giving a fake address. Their plan was to rob the deliveryman, but when he arrived,

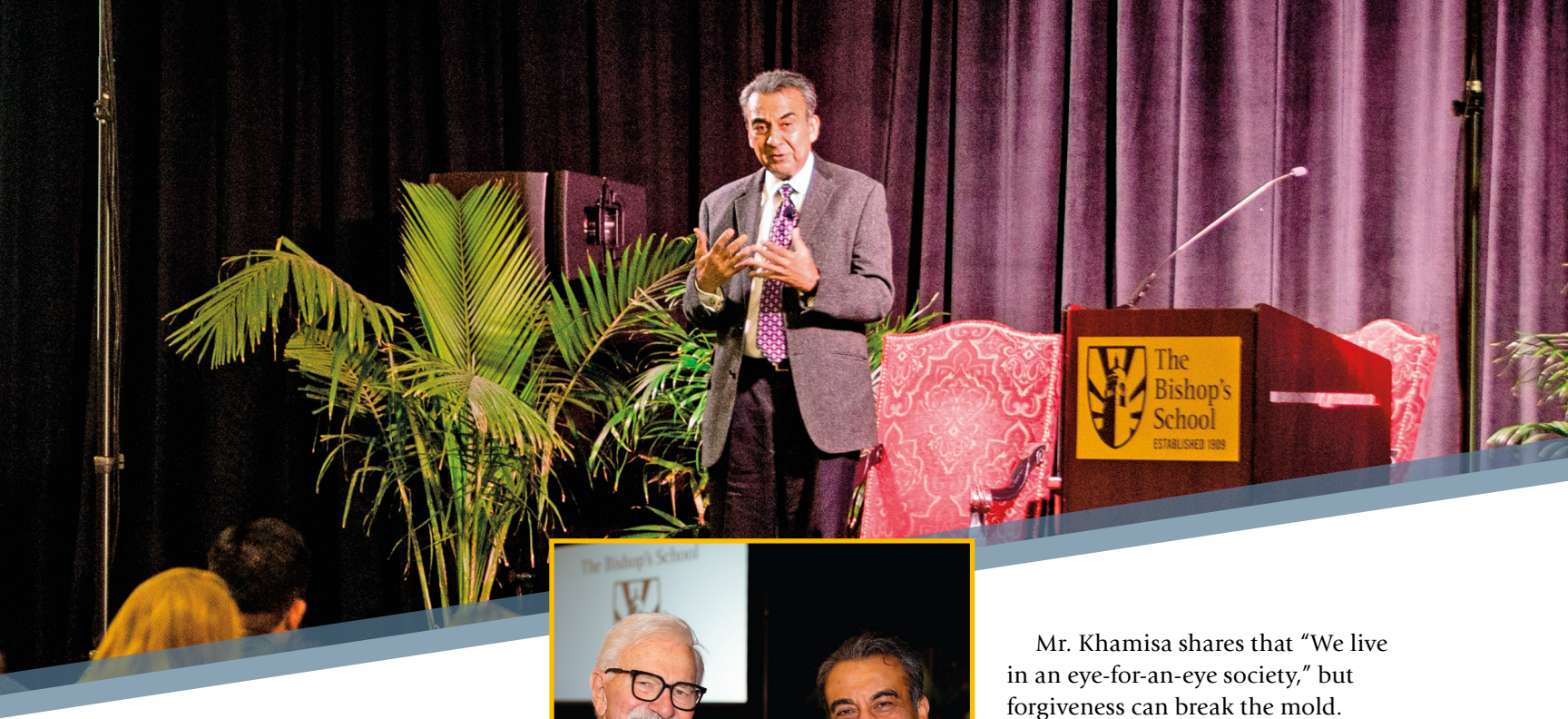
Tariq refused to go along. He got into his car, preparing to drive off. That's when the oldest boy handed a gun to 14-year-old Tony Hicks, ordering him to shoot Tariq. The boy fired a single shot, which went in through the car window and struck Tariq under his left shoulder blade, Mr. Khamisa said in a soft, even voice as he described his son's murder.

"Tariq died a couple of minutes later, drowning in his own blood, over a lousy pizza," Mr. Khamisa said.

Tony Hicks became the youngest person in California charged with murder as an adult, and he spent 24 years in prison before being released on parole in April 2019. Mr. Khamisa and his daughter, Tasreen, attended the parole hearing, and Mr. Khamisa spoke in favor of Mr. Hicks' release.

Mr. Khamisa hopes that Mr. Hicks will volunteer with the Tariq Khamisa Foundation, which was founded in the months after Tariq's death, with help and support from Mr. Hicks' grandfather, Plez Felix.

The goal of the foundation is to



“stop kids from killing kids,” Mr. Khamisa told the assembled Bishop’s students.

From the beginning, Mr. Khamisa and Mr. Felix bonded over the shared tragedy that both had endured.

“His grandson killed my son, and we are brothers,” Mr. Khamisa told the students. He sees Mr. Hicks not as a violent offender, but as a victim of societal pressures that led to his gang membership. “There were victims at both ends of the gun.”

Mr. Khamisa and Mr. Felix have spoken together hundreds of times, trying to turn young people away from gangs and violence. Mr. Khamisa believes that with the right encouragement and support, his goal of a less-violent society can be achieved. The foundation provides programs for youth, designed to end violence and foster peacemaking and forgiveness.

“Violence is a learned behavior. No kid is born violent,” Mr. Khamisa said at the assembly.

The bulk of Mr. Khamisa’s talk was devoted to a discussion of six principles that he contends (see callout) will lead young people to become non-violent leaders and peacebuilders. He encouraged Bishop’s students to become leaders for the cause of non-violence in their community.



Richard Woltman with Azim Khamisa

The six principles as outlined by Mr. Khamisa include:

- 1. Violence is real and hurts everyone.*
- 2. Actions have consequences.*
- 3. Always make good and non-violent choices.*
- 4. We can all choose forgiveness instead of revenge.*
- 5. Everyone, including you, deserves to be treated well and respected.*
- 6. From conflict, you can create sisterhood and brotherhood, love and unity.*

Mr. Khamisa shares that “We live in an eye-for-an-eye society,” but forgiveness can break the mold. “I believe in every crime there’s an opportunity to create a better society.”

“You have to build your forgiveness muscle, it will serve you well,” Mr. Khamisa told the students. He ended the presentation by leading Bishop’s students in a peacemaker pledge, in which they vowed to strive for peace in their homes, at school and in their community.

Mr. Khamisa’s message resonated with Bishop’s students, who admired his capacity for forgiveness and his determination to create something positive from the tragedy of his son’s death.

“It was a very beautiful story about the power of forgiveness,” says Lila Chitayat ’21.

“He didn’t want to be a victim forever. That realization is the most powerful part of (his presentation),” says R.J. Faltinsky ’20.

“It takes so much wisdom to separate the pain caused to you and the pain you might cause someone else,” says Abby Beamer ’22. “I can’t make that separation, but he’s so incredible for being able to do that.”

“It was really impressive how he managed to forgive someone who killed his own son,” says Marcus Buu-Hoan ’24.

Mr. Khamisa, who was born in Kenya and educated in England, worked for many years before his son’s death as an

international banker. Since then, much of his time has been devoted to the foundation, and its programs to prevent violence in schools and communities.

He first met Mr. Felix soon after Tariq's death, in the office of the public defender who handled Tony Hicks' case. Mr. Khamisa shared that he was not there for retribution or revenge, but to "make sure no one else winds up dead or in prison like our kids."

"He was quick to take my hand of forgiveness. Fast forward 24 years, and we are still together," Mr. Khamisa says.


The program developed by the foundation has four parts—a school assembly, a 10-week course on peacemaking, empathy and leadership, a peace club on campus and a mentoring program. Over the past 24 years the program has been introduced to 300 schools. Now, the foundation has pivoted toward training teachers to carry out its precepts, with an eye toward taking its message across the country. The program costs just \$100 per year per student, which Mr. Khamisa says is a bargain when compared with the \$148,000 annual cost of incarcerating one person.

"Nobody who has gone through our safe school model has shot anybody or will shoot anybody," he says.

As Mr. Hicks adjusts to life outside prison walls, Mr. Khamisa looks forward to the day when he can join him and his grandfather to encourage students to reject violence.

"Think about the power of him on stage," says Mr. Khamisa. "I believe he will save many young people who might be thinking of following in his former footsteps."

When Mr. Hicks is ready, he will become a valuable role model and speaker with the foundation.

"He's not the same person he was at 14 when he took the life of my son. I have high hopes for him." 

"He was quick to take my hand of forgiveness. Fast forward 24 years, and we are still together."



The Bishop's School

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A rite of passage

On Aug. 21, 2019 Bishop's officially welcomed 156 new students and installed Mr. Ron Kim as the 12th head of school.



Parents of alumni, if your child no longer maintains an address at your home, please provide an updated address to the alumni office. (858) 875-0505 • Fax (858) 456-2681 • tbsalumni@bishops.com