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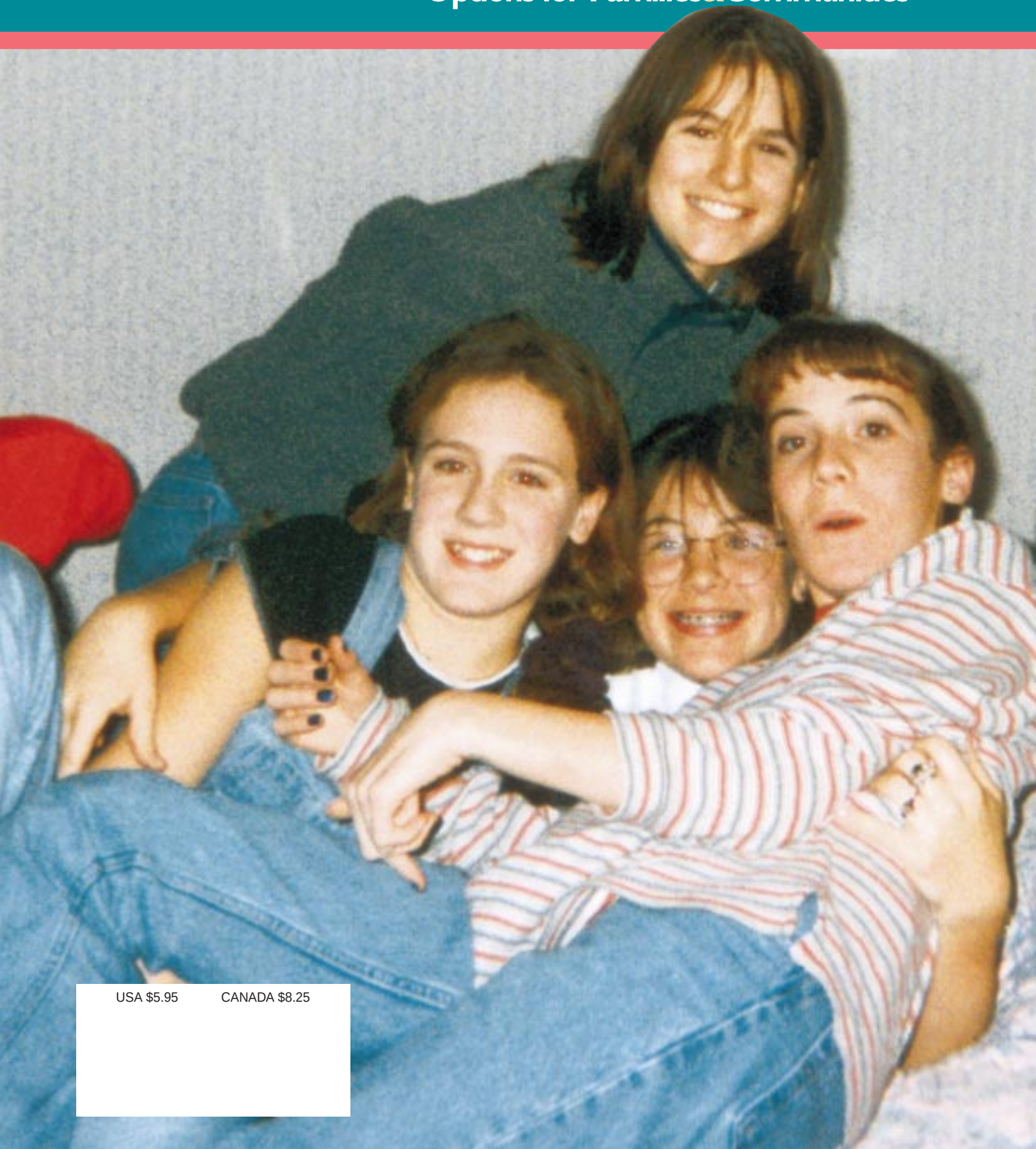

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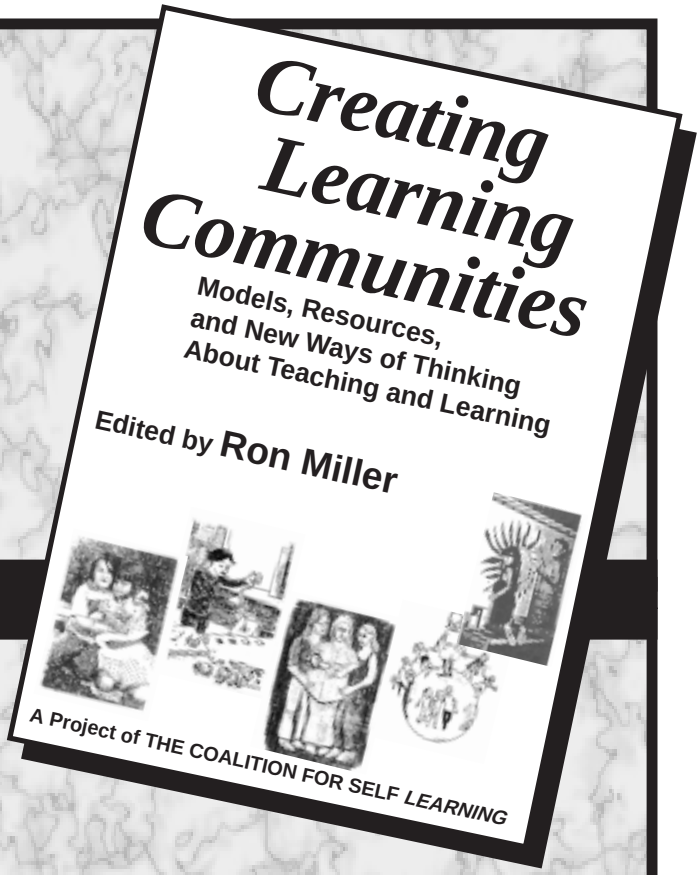

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Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

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Manuscripts

As stated in the Mission Statement for *Paths of Learning* (see http://www.great-ideas.org/pathmiss.htm), the purpose of this journal is to "encourage an understanding of education as a means of nourishing holistic personal development and a sustainable, democratic, and peaceful community life." To this end, we welcome manuscripts on any aspect of teaching, learning, and mindful living, written from diverse points of view and encompassing a wide range of educational choices.

Except in unusual cases, manuscripts should not exceed twelve pages. Submit three copies of the manuscript to the Editor of *Paths of Learning,* Richard Prystowsky. Manuscript submissions from youth (up to age 12) and from teens or young adults (through college age) should be sent to the appropriate editor c/o the journal's address or via e-mail. Manuscript should be double-spaced and printed in 12 point type. Submissions should be aimed at intelligent readers who, though interested in, might be unfamiliar with the subject matter being discussed. We also ask that authors demonstrate respect for persons holding alternative points of view, even if the authors passionately disagree with these views.

You may also fax your submission to the journal at 909-549-0516. If you wish to e-mail your submission, with or without attachments, please send your work to the editor at <rjprys@ix.netcom.com>. If you want your printed copies returned to you, please be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Please include with your submission a brief autobiographical statement, as well as a short, descriptive summary of your article. If your article is accepted for publication, we will then ask that you send us a photo of yourself, as well as one or more photos that you would like for us to consider using in connection with your article. We will also ask that you send (by mail or e-mail attachment) a copy of the final accepted article after all revisions have been made and approved by the editor.

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Paths of Learning

Options for Families & Communities

Issue Number 6 Autumn 2000

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Cover photo by Micky Mattie, Windsor, Connecticut

In the Spirit of Honoring

"And the question I want to raise with you:

In a sermon titled "Unfulfilled Dreams," delivered on March 3, 1968, a month before he was assassinated, Dr. King asked the congregates the question cited above (1998, 358). In this sermon, Dr. King said that he himself wanted to be a "good man" (p. 359); he made a similar point a month earlier, in an another sermon, in which he had said that he wished to be remembered after his death as someone who had cared about and tried to help those who were in need—not uncommonly, those who were in desperate need. He wanted persons to say, after his death, that he had "tried to love and to serve humanity." Alluding to his having lived a life rooted in non-materiality, he told those who heard him deliver this sermon: "I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind" ("The Drum Major Instinct" 1998, 366).

Dr. King's words move us so profoundly because they speak to our soul, to our spirit, to those deep parts of us that know that our sense of worth comes not from our material gains, but, rather, from our ability to live nobly and honorably, especially in the service of honoring and helping others. More particularly, Dr. King deeply understood the profound importance of our honoring and protecting those who are most vulnerable and powerless. Sometimes I am reminded of his work as I review manuscripts for *Paths of Learning*. I am often moved by the extent to which so many submissions in their own ways articulate Dr. King's concern for vulnerable persons who might otherwise be ignored or mistreated. Readers of *Paths* who have been with us for a while have seen such concern in various writings that we have published. The trend continues in the current issue, in which, once again, we see evidence of persons' commitment to fight for the rights of children, who remain the most vulnerable, underrepresented, and mistreated group of humans.

We see this concern for the welfare of the disenfranchised, for example, in Josephine Hinds' article about special-needs students in Texas. Mary Goral's article highlights the honoring of children through a Waldorf approach to teaching and learning. Jeff Cramer's piece on homeschooling gets to the heart of our pursuing educational paths that validate the needs and the very being of children. Jerry Mintz's interview with Zoe Readhead—Head of School at Summerhill—concerning that school's recent legal victory illustrates both the intense struggle and the sometimes great reward of our fighting for children's rights.

Margaret Hawthorn's profile article on The Meeting School addresses the spiritual needs of students, which are intimately connected to their need to remain whole while also being an integral part of community life. In this small Quaker school, we find principles and practices that both derive from and help to effect a soulful pursuit of community life and a strong commitment to honoring what Quakers believe to be the "internal divinity" of everyone—adults and children alike. In this article, we see a path of life and learning grounded in the age-old truth that we are all interconnected, and that whatever affects one individual thus affects us all. Reading this piece, one might be reminded of Dr. King's eloquent phrasing of this truth in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail": "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly" (1998, 189).

Not uncommonly, adults' desire and drive to honor children are infused with and intertwine with a sense of justice, of fairness, of rightness. Yet, for us adults, "doing the right thing" is often easier said than done. For children, though—at least for healthy ones—the pursuit of doing what is right, of arguing for what is fair, is a natural state of affairs. We are reminded of this idea in the interview with Nancy Gruver that we present here, in which we hear about the courage and commitment of young girls who seem innately and acutely aware of the presence or absence of fairness and justice, and who are understandably outraged when they see fairness and justice lacking. (For a sense of their commitment to fairness, see, following the interview with Nancy, the excerpt entitled "How Aggravating!")

In traditional schooling, this lack of fairness often amounts to a dishonoring of children in a multiplicity of ways, most notably and generally, perhaps, in the very confinement of children in a soul-numbing, imprisoning institution. One thinks of the following lines by the poet Rilke: "School's long anxiety and time slips past / with waiting, with endless dreary things." Small wonder that Rilke contrasts this tormenting experience with the child's joyful experience of being "outside" of this enclosed, suffocating,

the Children

is your heart right?" Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

life-denying place: "O solitude, O heavy spending on and on of time … /And then outside[,]" where "the streets flash and ring / and on the squares the fountains leap / and in the gardens all the world grows wide.—" (ellipses and em-dash in original). Rapturously, Rilke (en)chantingly continues, "O wondrous time, O spending on and on of time, / O solitude" (1991, 41). Certainly, good-faith alternative and reform-minded educators of all ilks understand what Rilke is saying.

To have significant meaning, the principles and practices of honoring our children must be experiential, and not just theoretical. Students at The Meeting School, for example, work—and work hard—at living mindfully and wholly. They experience life, and they do so deeply. So do the children in the Waldorf school that Mary Goral writes about; so do the Cramer children. Indeed, this kind of deep experiential learning is manifest in many of the articles that we present in this issue and that we have published in previous issues of *Paths*. It remains a common theme in many of the submissions that I receive.

Coming upon variations on this theme in article after article, one thinks of Thoreau's admonition that "it would be worth the while to introduce a school of children to such a grove, that they may get an idea of the primitive oaks before they are all gone, instead of hiring botanists to lecture to them when it is too late" (1999, 10). This is sage advice. We need to allow students to become the foresters themselves. We need to let them own their own experiences, and we need to recognize that they are the expert analysts of these experiences. "The audience wants a poet, a hired gun, to come in from out of town," poet Robert Bly once told an audience. But Bly wanted the audience to understand that they are their own experts, that they are themselves the poets of their own lives. Thus, he continued, "Everybody in this audience should be writing their own poems" (1988, 25). This, too, is sage advice.

In one of her poems that we offer in this issue, Loretta Johnson writes, "You might think you'll die tomorrow, / But really who knows when?" So let us take good heed to be fully present for our lives so that, when we write the poetry of our actions, our deeds, and not just our beliefs and intentions, will honor the children. But first, let us honor our own dignity so that we can recognize and honor the dignity of the children whose rights and freedoms we champion. In the process, perhaps we will discover or rediscover the creative magic of our own lives that we might have known as children but that, for various reasons, we might have learned to distrust or ignore as adults.

Such creative honoring underscores and manifests much of our spiritual strength as human beings. Committed to upholding the principle that everyone is dignified, we honor our special needs students. Committed to defending the integrity of parents and children, we honor our homeschooling families. Committed to fighting for children's rights in general, we honor our paths of noble actions. Acting on these commitments, we can answer in the affirmative Dr. King's question, "Is your heart right?"

This spirit of creative honoring moves us all, if we let it. And the force, if not also the substance, of this honoring is magic. "To my child's mind all was magic," writes Charlie Miles in her story "Remembering Christmas Trees." "Absolutely anything was possible. I was nine years old." In her reminiscence, she honors her child within, whose dignity manifests in the mindful, caring, remembering adult.

Dylan Thomas writes that "the memories of childhood have no order, and no end" (1954, 8). When our spirit of creative honoring moves us, we are all nine years old. Perhaps again. Perhaps for the first time.

Richard J. Prystowsky

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Faith, Practice, and the Trust of Community

A Profile of The Meeting School

By Margaret Hawthorn

Margaret Hawthorn became involved with the Religious Society of Friends as a teenager after participating in weekend work programs. She is the parent of three daughters, two of whom have attended The Meeting School. Besides working at TMS on special projects, she runs an established community care home for mentally disabled veterans with her husband.

Editorial introduction: In our previous issue of *Paths*, we published an article by David Stern concerning his positive struggles to help guide his students on meaningful learning paths while also respecting their need and right to determine their own educational journeys. In his article, entitled "Freedom or Structure: One Teacher's Journey," David refers often to the principles and practices of The Meeting School, where he teaches. We were so taken by the spirit and practices of this small, Quaker school, located in the rural town of Rindge, New Hampshire, that we decided to profile the school in this issue. With great delight, we thus present to you, our readers, a profile of this most engaging and soulful place of living and learning.

On the first deliciously hot day in May, students and faculty at The Meeting School gather at the barn to receive work study assignments for the afternoon. Black flies packing a nasty bite and New Hampshire's fickle weather notwithstanding, the entire Meeting School community participates in work study. Today as Ross checks on newborn lambs, Anton heads for the office to scan photos for the school website and a crew rounds up equipment to prune the pear trees.

The Meeting School was founded in 1957 by three Quaker families who wanted to offer their own children and other students a place where they could put Quaker values into practice in the context of a learning community. From the beginning, however, the community has never been limited to members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). In the tradition of Quaker schools, TMS has always sought diversity—including a variety of spiritual paths and sometimes a profession of no spiritual path at all—among its students.

The founders brought previous teaching experience to their venture, which informed many of their ideas about what would set The Meeting School apart, even from other Quaker schools. Faces, fashions, and some of the issues students bring to the community have changed over the years, but the philosophy and purpose of the school have remained consistent (see the end of this article for a full statement of the school's philosophy and purpose). To foster a close-knit community, the school still limits its size to forty high school-aged students and fourteen faculty members.

The 136-acre campus of woods, fields, and meadows is located in rural Rindge, New Hampshire, within sight of Mount Monadnock. Students and faculty live together in five houses clustered near each other. The original barn still stands, and the animals housed in it are an important part of the school. A passerby may experience a curious time warp. The nineteenth-century houses and the activities that take place around them suggest a simpler time: pressing apple cider, setting out sap buckets to boil maple syrup, plowing with oxen. But the students carrying eggs from the barn may have dreadlocks, blue hair, or an assortment of other trappings that clearly identify them as twenty-first century adolescents.

The Religious Society of Friends has minuted testimonies on subjects ranging from gambling to equality, stewardship to the death penalty, simplicity to slavery. Mindful of our human shortcomings, we regard each testimony as an ideal toward which we strive. As a Quaker institution, The Meeting School embraces all Friends' testimonies, focusing especially on peace, simplicity, and truthfulness. Friends have long found inspiration and guidance in the writings and practices of earlier Quakers.

Testimony on Peace

"We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world" (New England Yearly Meeting 1985, 183).

"So the keeper of the House of Correction was commanded to bring me up before the Commissioners and soldiers in the market place; and there they ... asked me if I would not take up arms for the Commonwealth against the King. But I told them I lived in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars" (p. 184).[1]

Through the centuries, one of the most powerful Quaker testimonies has been an absolute refusal to commit or threaten to commit physical harm to another human being. Like other Friends schools, ours affirms this testimony and extends it into the non-physical realm as well. We believe, for example, that lying and cheating are forms of psychological violence towards ourselves, and that gossip and slander are oblique forms of psychological violence towards others.

This testimony requires a spirit of cooperation, honesty, and respect for one another's individuality and conscience. It requires that we honor all people, addressing that of God in each person, and that we strive to live in ways which do not harm or oppress others. In turn, it teaches us to see discomfort and conflict as opportunities to listen deeply, to gain new insight and understanding, and to live peacefully together with our differences.

Testimony on Simplicity

"Do you regard your possessions as given to you in trust, and do you part with them freely to meet the needs of others? Are you frugal in your personal life and committed to the just distribution of the world's resources?" (New England Yearly Meeting 1985, 213).[2]

We try to live in simple harmony with the land and its resources, neither taking more than we need nor using irresponsibly what we take. Simply put, we wish to live simply so that others may simply live. We look to the examples of Jesus, Buddha, earlier Quakers like George Fox and John Woolman, and others who caution us not to allow our possessions to rule us.

Aware of the implications our actions have on the health of our planet, we look for life-affirming, environmentally sound products when making purchases. When we need to buy items for the school, for example, we consider where goods come from, and to the best of our ability we avoid purchasing items that have been produced in exploitive circumstances.

Simple, of course, doesn't necessarily mean easy. For example, an important aspect of living simply is speaking simply (plainly and honestly) to all people. At first, telling the direct truth may feel frightening, but in the end it is healthier and less complicated than employing a convoluted strategy of evasion.

Testimony on Truth

"But above all things, my brethren, swear neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea be yea and your nay, nay" (James 5:12).

Striving to maintain integrity in word and deed, Friends have traditionally refused to swear oaths. In the belief that all life is sacred at all times, Friends hold that no given moment is more special than another for speaking truth. Practicing consistent honesty is affirmation of one's intention to speak truth in a particular situation.

Because TMS is a community that lives by agreements, a high level of trust and personal integrity is required from each individual. No school or community agreement is to be entered into lightly. No agreement may be arbitrarily discarded or disregarded because it has become annoying or burdensome to an individual. This commitment to honesty that we expect from community members is a cornerstone of the personal growth that takes place in the school.

A day later the sky is overcast, and people wear wool sweaters again. Jacqueline Stillwell, Head of School, kneels by a flowerbed in front of the office, pulling weeds even though this is not a scheduled work study day. In the summer johnny jump-ups spill cheerfully over the rock border onto the lawn. Currently a clump of phlox has the upper hand.

Jackie warns anyone who approaches that she is in a bad mood. This is unusual. An active, lifelong Friend, Jackie has the ability to embrace conflict as an opportunity for growth. Today, however, she is discouraged; it's not conflict that is troubling her, but conflict avoidance. She has decided she needs to spend some time getting her hands dirty.

Some community members have proposed an amnesty program for persons who come forward to talk about having broken community agreements. With amnesty, they could tell the whole truth, which would help the community address the problems at hand. Despite her grumpy mood, Jackie smiles: "They want to be able to be honest without being held accountable."

She carefully separates the roots of the phlox, setting some aside to be planted elsewhere. Others she studies and places back in the ground, leaving space for the johnny jump-ups. In the Quaker process of seeking clearness, we try to understand what still serves us well and what we no longer need in order to allow room for new growth. After a couple hours in the garden, Jackie wipes her hands and is ready to resume her place in the office.

The Learning Enviornment at TMS

As a Quaker school, TMS operates from the belief that there is that of God in everyone. Each person is to be valued, and all life is sacred. Our goal is to create an educational program that nurtures creativity, love of learning, personal growth, and intellectual integrity. By intellectual integrity we mean the ability to think critically and to seek truth.

We are more interested in teaching students to ask probing questions than we are in having them focus on getting right answers. We challenge them to take responsibility for their own education. Helping students shift from being passive recipients of information to being independent, self-motivated thinkers is perhaps the greatest tool we can offer them on their way to becoming lifelong learners.

The school day begins with 8:00 A.M. opening, a time of gathering and reflection. Students who are on barn chores have been up for a few hours already and are wide awake; later risers still rub sleep from their eyes. Ten minutes of singing or other music is followed by ten to fifteen minutes of silent worship, and then announcements.

Morning classes are divided into two long blocks, each lasting an hour and forty-five minutes. These classes are open to all grade levels, with students making selections based on their interests and credit requirements. Some examples of classes offered in the morning are Asian studies, music theory and composition, genetics and evolutionary theory, art history and application, farming and crops, human sexuality, play-writing, pottery, and physics. Morning classes change each trimester, while math and languages, which are offered in the afternoon, run continuously through the school year.

Our credit system for graduation offers students more flexibility and choices than do traditional educational systems. To graduate, a student must complete three credits of English, two credits in science (at least one lab), two credits in social studies, one and one-half credits of algebra, one half credit of geometry, one credit of health, and three credits of electives. Other graduation requirements include researching and writing a senior paper, completion of an intersession project for each year of attendance at the school, and satisfactory participation in the work study program.

A number of students who choose TMS have not had productive experiences in their previous school settings. When given greater choice over what and how they are going to learn, they connect with the material and are more motivated. By offering alternative classes that spark their interest, we can help them hone critical thinking skills in ways that we couldn't in more generic classes, in which many students might be too bored to pay attention.

Whatever the class, we look for real-life examples as the primary focus of study. From art to science to math to social studies, we relate much of the learning to life and to the farm. In chemistry, for example, students do soil testing, both before and after planting. Dissection specimens for biology come from the reality of farm life (i.e., a stillborn pig) rather than from bottles of formaldehyde. A math student graphs milk production on a computer and analyzes the results.

Two students in the same class may fill different subject requirements by emphasizing different areas of study. In Farming and Agriculture, for instance, one student may gain a social studies credit through studying the history of farming in the U.S., while another earns a science credit by focusing on soil samples and sustainable agriculture practices. Both will broaden the scope of the class with reports from their specialized studies.

The five-and-a-half-day school week includes Saturday morning forum, when speakers bring a variety of ideas and challenges to the community. Recent forum topics have included organic farming in Cuba, cheese making, acupuncture, and tracking animals in the snow. Current issues like the meaning of global economy, the sanctions in Iraq, and activism in the United States are also talked about in forums.

We encourage many field trips to expand classrooms to the world beyond our rural enclave. Students studying issues concerning the death penalty, for example, not only read about the problems at stake, but also attend death penalty hearings at the New Hampshire State House. Geology classes hike river valleys and climb mountains to study formations unique to New England. A genetics class visits the Whitehead Lab at MIT to talk with researchers, and has a chance to actually work with genetically modifying material at the Boston Science Museum.

An exciting piece of off-campus learning happens each spring when all students head out for a four-week intersession. Some students connect their projects with previous areas of interest. In 2000, Jeremy's love for marine biology led him to volunteer at the Virgin Island Environmental Research Station. Inspired by a longtime interest in Hinduism, Raquel traveled to India to stay in an Ashram. In other years, students wanting to develop their Spanish have done work projects in Guatemala and Costa Rica.

Students may also decide to use intersession as a time to try something new. Following a very basic set of instructions from a book written in 1910, Luke spent his time building a glider big enough to carry him aloft for a few feet. Eileen traveled with a midwife in upstate New York, assisting with checkups and being privileged to witness the birth of a child. Whatever they choose to do during this time, when they return to campus, each student gives an oral report to the community about her or his project.

Farm and Work Study

At noon the community comes together again for lunch. All students and faculty participate in meal preparation on a rotating basis. They become adept at serving meals that meet the tastes and nutritional needs of meat-eaters, vegetarians, and vegans, while debating the impact of diets and lifestyles on personal health and the well-being of the planet. How does heavy U.S. consumption of meat affect availability of food for the rest of the people in the world? How much physical work can one accomplish on a diet of rice and tofu? If everyone were to eat locally grown food, what would our diet look like? What would the landscape look like?

Work study, meetings, and interest groups are scheduled for later in the afternoon, depending on the day. In keeping with

our belief in the dignity of physical labor and our emphasis on experiential learning, students are expected to put in two-hour blocks of work at least twice a week to help with the running of the school. This may include projects on the farm, in the gardens, and around the physical plant (wood stacking, planting, weeding, and—seasonally determined—either manure or snow shoveling). Jobs might also involve taking care of faculty children, organizing community food, or cleaning the office.

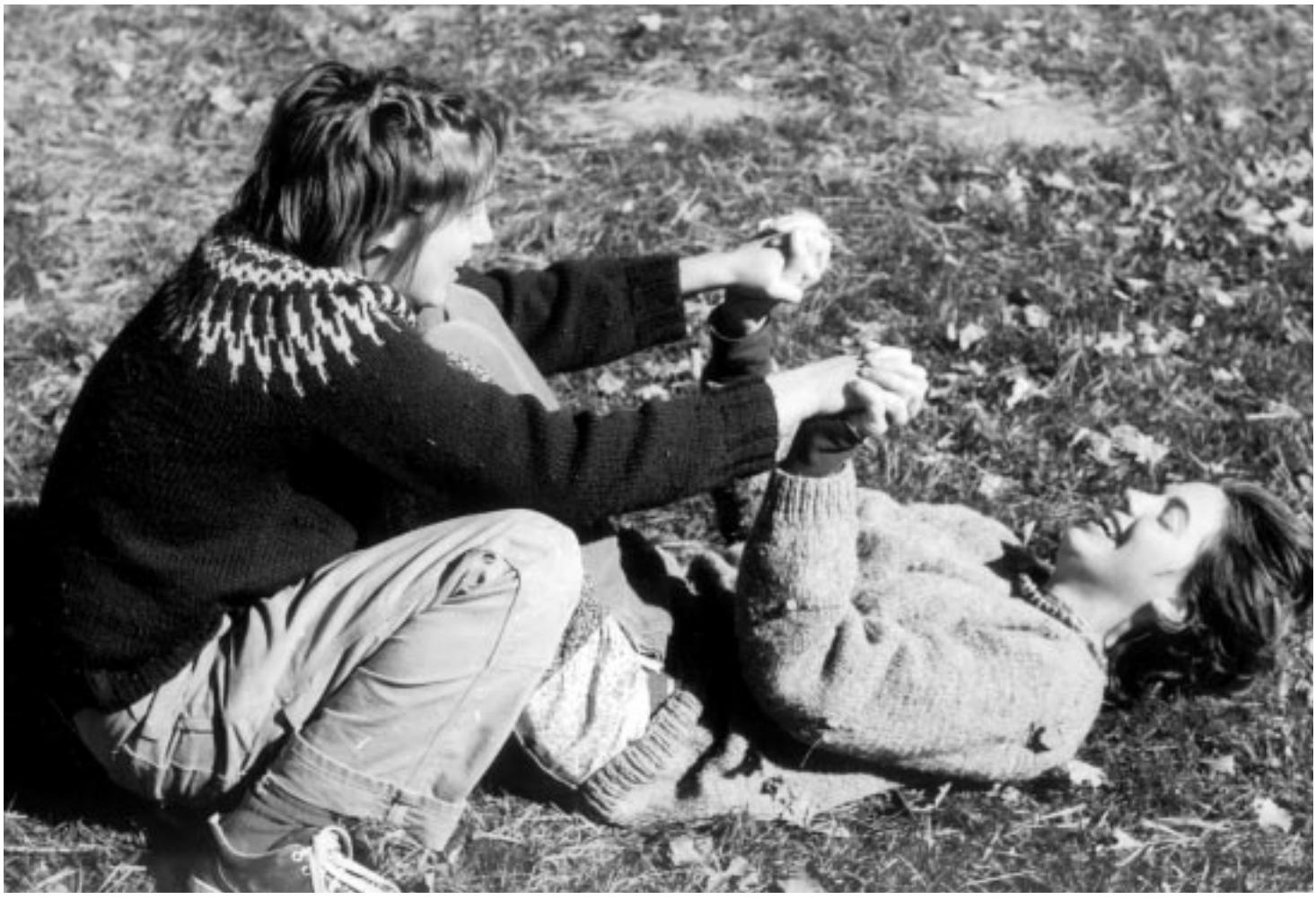
Community members are responsible for housekeeping and plant maintenance campus-wide. While students sometimes resist the relentlessness of chores, in the process of maturing as community members they tend to find that chores lose their negative onus. They discover that the steady rhythm of physical work contributes to a sense of wholeness.

Our working farm is an integral part of daily life at TMS—an ever present reminder of our commitment to simplicity and of our connection to the earth. The farm is home to dairy and beef cattle, oxen, horses, pigs, sheep, chickens, turkeys, guinea fowl, rabbits, and a bumper crop of red worms whose specialty is breaking down compost piles. We have several gardens and greenhouses, which produce the bulk of the community's vegetables. We use organic methods of food production, avoiding pesticides, artificial fertilizers, medicated feeds, and genetically modified organisms.

Through living and working on the farm, we learn about issues involving animal husbandry and land management. We gain firsthand awareness of the worldwide impact genetically modified seeds, bovine growth hormones, and chemical pesticides have had on the politics and economics of farming. The work required of the entire community to produce most of our own meat, milk and vegetables gives us great appreciation for the bumper sticker, "Don't Criticize Farmers With Your Mouth Full."

In gaining a better understanding of the life cycle, we are brought face to face with ethical concerns. For all of us, dietary choices are more complex than we might have realized. Some people feel right about eating meat, but only from animals they have raised. Others refuse to eat meat from animals they have fed and cared for. Although the latter may decide not to eat any meat, on the farm they discover that milk and eggs are part of the whole life cycle. And as they work in the cold or mud, all the while understanding more and more deeply their connections to the earth and to all beings, many students cannot help but wonder about the production and moral status of their down jackets and leather shoes.

No matter how each individual resolves these sorts of questions, students develop an awareness that will impact their choices involving their and others' lifestyles and consumer habits. Indeed, after living in the TMS community, one finds it difficult to walk into a grocery store and not have questions about what is on the shelves. What does this box contain? What processes have its contents undergone on the way from field to shelf? Where did this plastic-wrapped meat come from? How was the animal it came from treated and fed? What were the working conditions of the people who tended it?



Routines, Decisions, and Obligations

Because the days are packed, evenings are less structured. This is when students must develop self-discipline to keep a balance between socializing and keeping up with schoolwork. Completing academic projects in a timely fashion is the responsibility of each student, but a student who is having difficulty managing time may be assigned to evening study hall.

Evenings are a favorite time for playing music—quietly in student common rooms in the houses, or more loudly in the weaving studio, which is set a little apart from the houses. When a theater project is in the works, rehearsals are scheduled for evenings. The art studio and photography lab are always open. On Tuesday nights, an ongoing Dungeons and Dragons group meets to test wits.

Wednesdays have a different flow. Students prepare brunch in individual houses while the faculty meeting takes place. After brunch the community gathers for an hour of traditional Quaker Meeting for Worship. For some, this stillness is a time for prayer. Others use it for disciplined meditation, or quiet contemplation.

Following Meeting for Worship, students and faculty settle into Community Meeting. As TMS's form of governance, Community Meeting patterns its decision-making process after Quaker Meeting for Business. We begin with another brief period of silence, during which we center ourselves for working together on the matters before us.

The concepts of "meetings" and "decisions" have particular meaning and importance in Quaker communities. Over three hundred years ago early members of the Religious Society of Friends established a grass roots structure for decision-making based on the belief that every individual has direct access to inner truth. They found that when they made a corporate effort (meaning a decision by the body of the Meeting) to seek and follow Divine guidance they were led to unity, and they were often given a higher collective insight than they received acting as separate individuals.

Decisions within the Society, arrived at from the bottom up, are based on a sense of unity within the group rather than on majority rule. While this practice can be cumbersome, it is also extremely empowering. Every person brings a unique set of gifts and perspectives, and all are important.

"This matter of weighing the individual utterances in arriving at the sense of the meeting is quite fundamental to the Quaker method. Several Friends may quite sincerely speak in one direction, and then one Friend may express an insight which carries weight and conviction in the meeting in a different sense. This one acceptable communication may outweigh in significance several more superficial ones" (Selleck 1985, 116).

A spiritual sense of unity differs from the secular concept of consensus. While consensus may imply looking for the broadest area of common acceptance, Friends seek agreement that is compatible with the consciences of all who participate in the decision-making. To understand this crucial distinction even more clearly, one must keep in mind that, for Quakers, all meetings are grounded in worship, and those who participate in meetings work with the premise that the group's decision is being guided by God. Persons who for one reason or another do not feel that they can take part in the ongoing process of decision-making step aside, not only because they do not want to impede the group's progress, but also because they understand that the decision-making process is Divinely guided.

For Quakers, then, unity goes beyond consensus or compromise. As the following passage intimates, this unity derives from and represents the Divinely inspired mind or spirit of the Meeting, which guides the meeting's outcome.

"The 'mind of the meeting' may not always reach that clarity which we could have wished, yet we may be satisfied that, having regard to the frailties of human nature, our partial apprehension of the truth, the varying gifts with which we have been endowed, the fallibilities of our judgment, the decision we have reached is for us, in this situation, right and proper, and should do no final violence to the judgment of any members" (Dunstan 1985, 116).

At TMS there are no student elections, no campaigns for prestigious positions. Rather, a nominating committee gathers names of people willing to serve in various roles, with the understanding that every community member will participate in some capacity of the running of the school. After giving careful consideration to matching interests, skills, and gifts of individuals with the jobs that need to be done, the nominating committee brings a proposed slate to Community Meeting for approval. Students and faculty serve together, rotating positions twice a year.

Nominating Committee looks for leadership, open-mindedness, and familiarity with Quaker practices when recommending someone as Clerk of Community Meeting (always a student). Responsibilities of the Community Meeting Clerk include—and extend beyond—facilitating the weekly gathering for business. The Clerk of Community Meeting confers regularly with the Head of School and sits on Ministry and Counsel Committee.

Clerking a meeting requires the ability and patience to listen well in order to discern the sense of the meeting. The Clerk must be willing to hear more than his/her own preferred opinions. Sometimes discernment comes easily; people are readily in agreement and everything fits together smoothly. Often, however, the Clerk has the task of teasing from a jumble of opinions threads that will eventually lead to unity.

A student with a keen interest in developing stronger clerking skills can gain experience by volunteering to clerk one of the school committees, such as Curriculum, Celebrations, Community Life, Farm, and Physical Plant. In addition, all entering students take an oral communications class, which addresses self-awareness, clerking skills, and conflict resolution.

"Friends believe that true leadership consists first and foremost in being led. This conception involves a curious but profound paradox. True leaders are not in any important sense initiators; rather, they are chiefly responders to the Divine Will" (New England Yearly Meeting 1985, 114).[3]

Ministry and Counsel Committee, consisting of the Head of School, Community Meeting Clerk, Student Clerk, and one person from each of the five houses in a balance of age and gender, is charged with tending to the spiritual and emotional health of the school. This committee meets weekly to address concerns that come up and to consider how they might guide the rest of the school in responding to them. Ministry and Counsel may also suggest that it's time to lighten up and celebrate the arrival of spring with an all-school ice cream outing. They may make a recommendation to Community Meeting regarding some logistical change that they think will improve the school's community life.

Whether it is dealing with a concern that is disciplinary or of another nature (a separate Disciplinary Committee does not

exist at TMS), the community uses a Quaker process of forming an *ad hoc* clearness committee to respond to personal issues that need to be addressed. For Quakers, being clear means more than simply knowing the facts. It implies having the openness in one's heart that promotes an ability to listen and really hear, which in turn leads to clarity of spirit. We work with two types of clearness meetings. One deals with people's relationships; the other deals with minute-breaking or suspected minute-breaking.

A clarification: the term "minute" is commonly used to mean a summary of the proceedings of a meeting. Friends expand the use of the word by referring to a specific agreement the Meeting has come to as an action minute. This can involve coming to unity on a testimony (opposition to the death penalty, for example), or it may refer to a specific action (approving a budget). At TMS, a number of action minutes regarding the use of illegal drugs or alcohol on campus, appropriate sexual behavior, and so on were approved in the first years of the school's existence. These minutes, which remain in place as agreements within the community, are discussed with all prospective community members, who will be expected to abide by them should they choose to join the community.

When two or more individuals (student and student, student and faculty, faculty and student, faculty and faculty) are having a difficult time with one another, each chooses a support person and agrees upon a facilitator who will meet with them and help them to work things out. Sometimes they reach specific behavioral agreements; sometimes they express feelings and listen to each other in an attempt to feel more comfortable together. At times, this same *ad hoc* committee reconvenes to check on how their relationship is developing. Rather than resorting to gossip, community members who are having difficulty are expected to talk directly with each other or have a clearness meeting.

In the case of minute-breaking, the committee consists of the person who has broken the minute, the person who is confronting him or her about the behavior, support people chosen by each of these individuals, and a facilitator agreed upon by both parties. At least one member of a clearness committee regarding minute-breaking must be a faculty member. When a person comes forward voluntarily about her or his having broken a minute, someone is chosen from the community to serve as confronter.

The committee tries to become clear about the facts, and to understand why the person broke a community agreement. They allow the individual and other community members time to listen carefully to each other's feelings about what has happened. They make an effort to determine both the person's intentions for the future and what kind of support is needed for the person to carry out those intentions. They look for ways in which the individual can rebuild the community's trust in him/herself. Then the group considers what response is appropriate to the behavior and makes a recommendation to the faculty and the Head of School.

This painstaking process, which may admittedly be frustrating to learn, eventually evolves into a deep understanding of the nature of who we are. People who join the TMS community agree to live by the standards of behavior as recorded in the Community Meeting minutes, and the school functions on faith in the good intentions of those who come here. Willingness to work with the clearness process is a baseline requirement; anyone unwilling to do so is asked to leave the community until he or she is ready to meet this expectation. If minute-breaking activity continues after several clearness meetings, it may be an indication that TMS is not the right school for this person.

Training and participation in Quaker meeting and decision-making prepares our students and faculty to participate meaningfully not only in Quaker communities, but also in the world at large. In November 1999, for example, five students and three faculty members went to Seattle to protest the World Trade Organization. In pre-demonstration training on non-violent direct action, TMS students were surprised to discover how familiar they already were with facilitating or clerking small group discussions. They had skills to carry them beyond simply agreeing to be physically non-violent. Within their small groups they became leaders in helping people listen to each other and work together.

Lambing season, which was in full swing when the students returned from intersession, has yielded eight woolly critters. Seedlings started indoors back in April are being planted in the garden. With this year's slow, cool spring, the lilacs bloomed and faded quickly. Wrap-up of various academic, farm, and community projects boosts an ordinarily intense pace of life to the point of being borderline frantic.

On top of everything else, graduation minutes must be completed. In lieu of a diploma, each graduate receives a minute in the form of a hand-printed, artfully decorated scroll that describes individual qualities and personal vignettes from his or her time at the school. Seniors are banned from the office, where other students and faculty members concentrate on capturing the essences of their beloved friends in calligraphy and water color.

Shortly before the big day, a Gloucester Old Spot sow delivers twelve healthy piglets. On a sunny Sunday in June, mother and offspring grunt contentedly from their shed as community and family members gather for the graduation celebration in the barn, where it has been held traditionally for over forty years. Loft beams are festooned with flowers. The calves and horses have given up their stalls, which have been rearranged to make room for wooden benches from the local Quaker Meeetinghouse. As we settle into worship, hens and even the ever-loquacious guinea fowl honor the quiet. Only the barn swallows continue their discussion about the unusual number of people packed into their peaceful home, but in the end they decide it is okay and fall silent.

Following a period of worship, the minute for each senior is read aloud. These collections of catch phrases and memories are skillfully woven into poems, a rap song with drum and guitar accompaniment, a stream of conscious images, all blended with the personalities of the graduates. At the end, guests sing a simple round of love and appreciation, while those who have lived, worked, and worshipped together for the past year make a procession into the field behind the barn for a closing circle.

The Meeting School is well named. People gather frequently in a variety of contexts throughout the day to seek greater understanding of themselves and the world around them. In a pamphlet titled "Meeting for Learning: Education in a Quaker Context," Quaker educator Parker Palmer, (1985), writing on Quaker education more generally, sums up well and poignantly the essence of what this school, this community, is about:

> *As my understanding of meeting enlarges, it becomes clear that one may speak of another kind of meeting: meeting for learning. Where else should the search for truth have greater prominence than in the process of education? Of course, for many of us "education" has come to mean a scramble for information, which leads to grades, which lead to a diploma, which leads to a job. There are too many educational institutions where truth is not the point. Perhaps the image of a "meeting for learning" will remind us of forgotten depths in the educational process, just as the silent meeting for worship once stood as a rebuke to ways of worship which put the human before the divine.*

Editorial introduction: In June 2000 Margaret Hawthorn, author of the profile article on The Meeting School, met with Jacqueline Stillwell, Head of School at The Meeting School, to elaborate on clearness, boundaries, and transformations.

A few days after graduation, the campus is quiet. While the faculty spend the morning hiking a local mountain, Curly, the four-hundred-pound boar, seizes the moment to go on an adventure. With an extra helping of grain, the office staff lure him back to his comfy pen in the bottom of the barn. Mama Hen parades her brood through the manure pile, teaching them to scratch below the surface to find red worms. The fields will be hayed as soon as New Hampshire receives three consecutive days without rain. Back from hiking, Jackie sits down to talk about the school.

M: The clearness process is a big part of the education that happens here, but it must be repetitive and time-consuming. Do you ever feel like you are reinventing the wheel?

J: It's a matter of recognizing this is the journey of the human condition. We have things we need to face and grow through. There are definitely characteristics inherent in the teen years, so we just keep working on them, over and over again.

The community has a rhythm of its own that we go through every year. It has a different pace each year, special to each group of people. We all come with this beautiful vision. Then we go through disillusionment when minutes are broken, and we struggle with the sense of betrayal and not being able to trust each other. When we face all of that together honestly, we grow into another place where we have a renewed sense of vision that is more real, unlike the first one that was sort of idealistic.

For a while it's truly workable, and the agreements hold up. Then we have the next stage where we are living with the minutes and we discover that just because we agreed doesn't make it easy. It's still hard, and we learn how to do the hard work. Without following that rhythm, no real solid learning would happen. Until we experience the disillusionment of broken minutes, we can't get to the place where we fully own the solution.

M: But after the first disruption of the idealism, followed by the hard work, there are still episodes of minute-breaking sprinkled throughout the year.

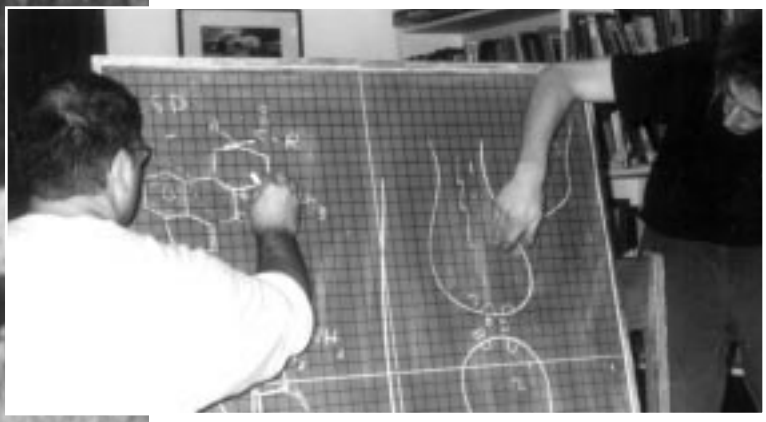
J: Yes. Part of the developmental stage of teenagers is testing the limits. They'll push the edges. That's the learning tool. One who naturally pushes finds out what the limits are. But those who tend to observe somebody else pushing also learn. They learn how the rest of the community can deal with limit testing by looking at certain questions. How do we respond to someone pushing? How do we honestly name what's going on so we can come together about it as opposed to just divorcing ourselves from that person?

There is a difference between working a situation out so you can rebuild trust, and sending the person who has broken the agreement away so you can pretend you are no longer in relationship with them. In many schools, if you break this or that rule once, you're gone. You definitely learn something. You learn you can't step over that line. Here, too, one would hope that you're learning that, but you're also learning it is possible to help work with a person who has stepped over the line so that better choices can be made in the future.

Children begin with external boundaries. When they cross them, there are external consequences. We try to teach our students to internalize and understand a boundary so that it makes sense to them. Then they choose it as their own boundary.

M: What kinds of kids tend to choose TMS?

J: Students who like planning for themselves, who appreciate having independence and freedom. The school works well for kids who are able to use this independence responsibly. It can work especially well for homeschoolers who want to be learning in conjunction with others and to have more social interaction for their high school years.



It is true that some students don't have the ability to learn within the TMS framework because they need things clearly defined in black and white. Kids who are successful here are ones who can work well with the clearness process.

M: Students here appear to have optimism. Something in them says, "I can dream and make it happen."

J: Yes, they do. And they're usually fairly realistic about how far they can dream. They tend to know what they can make happen by themselves, and what they need to invite others to help with in order to realize their goals. It's a return of hope. The "can do" part is where the hope comes from.

People get discouraged when they don't feel they have any power to make something happen. As soon as they feel they have something to contribute to make it happen, they begin to believe things are possible. I think a lot of kids grow up today in situations where they don't feel like they have a sense of purpose or of being able to effect change.

TMS kids know they can effect change. They watch it happen, and they actively participate. While they're here they create changes. It's not an abstract idea; it's a tangible thing that's going on all the time. In a clearness meeting, if you work through a disagreement with someone, a change happens. You've participated in making that change.

M: What do you see TMS graduates taking into the world with them?

J: They leave here with an understanding of how to ask for what they need, and an awareness of what gifts they have to offer. They know both their shortcomings and their strengths, and how to work with them. At TMS they learn about the hard work that comes between holding a vision and actually achieving the reality. Much of that has to do with knowing how to work with people.

Older alumni talk about a transformation in their lives that has empowered them to live more fully. It usually has to do with understanding themselves better, and understanding themselves in relationship with others. This transformation has helped them be whole, to dare to dream, and go after it. Not in a naïve way, but with some real understanding of what they can accomplish. In fact, that's one of the goals mentioned in our statement of philosophy and purpose: *to empower people to live joyfully with spiritual, emotional and physical integrity.*

Our alumni reflect that, as unhappy as they may have been sitting in all those committee meetings and dealing with all that Quaker process, it works. And it works outside of here, without the Quaker backdrop. In your job, you may work with five other people on a team. You can take the process that you've learned here and ask others to join with you in working together. It's useful and successful because it involves a win/win approach. Some of the strategies taught in college level business management classes are things that TMS students witness and practice over and over until they become second nature by the time they graduate.

Here are some comments made by departing seniors in the final Community Meeting of this year:

"I learned how to say no—how not to be used by others."

"Life at TMS is probably one of the toughest things I'll ever face. To embrace confusion, to be creative amidst tragedy. I learned a whole lot I didn't expect to learn."

"I learned who I am. I couldn't be more thankful for that."

"I learned both sides of an issue are truths—no matter how open you are, you are biased. Also, manners work well. They help things go smoothly."

"Coming from war-torn Yugoslavia, and then spending a year in Prague where I felt unwelcome, I doubted my ability to make good choices. I learned confidence again, and felt respected."

"I learned how to love here. TMS was a safe place to do that."

The Meeting School Philosophy and Purpose

The Meeting School exists to give young people and adults the opportunity to live and learn in a community based on the principles and practices of the Religious Society of Friends.

We are called to seek and to live with Divine guidance both individually and collectively.

The community provides secondary education and undertakes to empower people to live joyfully with spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical integrity.

We depend on each person to accept responsibility for his or her own growth, and to participate fully in the life of the community. We acknowledge and nurture the unique worth and insight of each person in our daily living, learning and decision-making.

We emphasize simplicity, honesty, the peaceful resolution of conflict, the dignity of physical labor, mutual trust and respect, and care for each other and the earth.

In all we do at TMS and in the wider world we strive to exemplify a deep sense of compassion and justice.

Notes

1. Both passages, from a declaration presented to King Charles II, originally appeared in *George Fox: Journal,* edited by John L. Nickalls (1952).

2. *Faith and Practice,* Part III—Advices and Queries.

3. From a report on a workshop at Pendle Hill.

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Now What?

Reflections by Robin Martin

Would you like to learn more about TMS, Quaker education, other farming schools, or school community building outside the framework of Quaker education? Here are some places you might want to begin…

A Visit to The Meeting School

The school's website provides many colorful photos and brief descriptions of all its core programs at http://www.mv.com/ipusers/tms/. Or better than visiting a website, visit the school itself. It is located in southern New Hampshire at 56 Thomas Road, Rindge, New Hampshire 03461. Telephone: 603-899-3366. Fax: 603-899-6216.

Quaker Schools and Quaker Education

For an alphabetical listing of over 30 Quaker schools worldwide and links to their websites, visit http://www.quaker.org/schools.html.

Friends Council on Education (FCE) is the central organizing force for Quaker K-12 schools. Their website includes a plethora of information and ways to get in touch with Quaker educators. http://mathforum.com/fce/

For a complete list of Quaker bookstores, with educational books and much more, located both online and offline, visit http://www.quaker.org/bookstores.html.

Other Farming Schools

The Farm School (Summertown, Tennessee)—"Farm people want students to understand the relationship of everything they do to consequences in the outside world. Simple things like eating and going to the bathroom may have global consequences, and the actions of each of us affect the whole. This is the essence of instruction at The Farm School today: learning locally, thinking globally." http://www.thefarm.org/lifestyle/fs.html

Scattergood Friends School (West Branch, Iowa)—"Comprising 80 acres of land ... the farm operates as a vital learning center of Scattergood Friends School. Its mission is to teach people how to produce healthy foods through the caring for plants, animals, and the soil; to impart a respect, understanding, and appreciation of nature; and to share the farming way of life as an important component of a complete education." http://www.scattergood.org/pages/home.html

Sustainability in Education

In a little known book called *Adventures on Arnold's Island and Other Essays on Education*, Arnold Greenberg (1994) writes an essay that highlights issues concerning the integration of farming as playing a significant role in meaningful learning experiences for youth, not unlike some of the core philosophies of TMS. This essay, "Homesteading: Stepping Back Towards the Future" (pp. 163-187), begins with personal concerns about the environment and then illustrates a four-year experiment that Greenberg tried to create called "The Deep Run School of Homesteading and Organic Agriculture." This essay depicts with great clarity the philosophic and practical importance that farming can play in the education of teenage youth as they move into adulthood. This book is available from the Left Bank Press, P.O. Box 981, Blue Hill, ME 04614, USA.

In addition, Andrew Faust, staff at Upattinas School (in Glenmoore, Pennsylvania) and board member of the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools (http://www.ncacs.org), is coordinating a "Resource Center for Bioregional Living." This is an ongoing sustainability program and an exchange between schools that are wishing to learn more about building school campuses that actively nurture the relationships between young people and nature. Andrew offers classes on permaculture design, restoration ecology, natural building techniques, and the history of the ecological crisis in modern times. Next year he will focus on field projects in streambank restoration, organic farming techniques and "regreening" Philadelphia. He takes many trips to visit and work with the folks all up and down the East Coast who are doing this kind of work and who are practicing off-the-grid ways of living. For more information, contact Andrew at Upattinas, phone 610-458-5138, or e-mail KarlineJ@aol.com.

About Community Building

"The Quaker Decision-Making Process: What is it? How Can We Use It in a Friends School?" an article by Barbara Rose Caldwell, online in the "Literature on the Web" of the FCE website.

The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace by M. Scott Peck, 1987 (reprinted in 1998), explores the more spiritual and subtle powers of individuals who gather together in real communities. Among other concepts, the idea of "inclusivity" has direct implications on how to build learning communities that are more appreciative of diversity. Several times throughout the book, Peck uses the example of his own Quaker school experience to build his case about the impact of community on learning and personal growth.

In addition to TMS and Quaker schools, many alternative schools offer variations on school meetings, conflict resolution programs, or other practices that bring about the kind of deep sense of community not found in most traditional schools. To learn more about various kinds of alternative schools, click on the "learning options" resources in the Thematic Search section of the Paths of Learning Resource Center, http://www.PathsOfLearning.net, or browse NCACS school members' websites, http://www.ncacs.org.

If you would like more reflections on and descriptions of Quaker and alternative community education resources, we invite you to visit our Online Action Guides at http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm, where you can more easily link to these and other books and websites. Or, for a printed version of this Online Action Guide, call 1-800-639-4122.

PHOTO BY POPPY BRANDES

Shanti Rose Nagel on the bridge overlooking the town of Montelieu.

"Bonjour, Tristesse"

By Shanti Rose Nagel

One … Two … Three … His fists go down hard on her chest. Air is forced down her lungs, but is not returned. His shaky high voice commands: "One. Two. Three. Come on, breathe!" Again, his weight comes smashing down on her chest; air is pushed from his mouth into hers. Vomit is all that returns.

I am in France for the month of July to help my friend Iris. She owns a charming café and inn in the wine country, under the shadow of the rugged Pyrenees. The town of Montalieu has five hundred residents; almost half are retired nuns. Tucked in between two rivers, this ancient town resembles a medieval castle. Built in the fourteenth century, it stands high above the riverbeds and looks like a natural rock formation. The old ochre stone dwellings connected one to another surround the crumbling church. The meandering cobblestone streets are barely wide enough for a car to pass. Brightly painted shutters and flower boxes overflowing with geraniums reveal the individuality of the hidden residents. People gossip across second story windows and laundry flaps gaily in the streets. Feral cats slink away into the gutters as the mockingbird taunts them from the gnarled and twisted grapevine.

Here at *Café du Livre,* Iris has created an international retreat where aspiring writers come to hone their craft. I have come to be the friendly serving wench and help Iris keep things running smoothly. I awake early every morning with the sun. In the

Shanti Rose Nagel is currently the co-owner of Mantis Organic Farm, an organic farm in upstate New York building a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) project through which members buy shares and receive weekly deliveries of fresh, beautiful vegetables. "In farming," she says, she "sees the beautiful miracle of life every year."

attic bedroom, where I am hidden from the quests, I light a candle to find my toothbrush. Downstairs I run to the bakery for the day's croissants and *grand pain* while the water for coffee and tea comes to a boil. I help set out breakfast on fine linens before the first sleepy-eyed guests stumble down the stairs. That is when I take up my post in the old-fashioned but exceedingly charming kitchen. First the towering stack of dishes from the past night's dinner are washed and dried, then the breakfast dishes are cleared and cleaned, and finally I start the day's laundry. Clutching a wicker basket overflowing with white linens, I stroll across town to the old dusty bookstore, which houses the washer and dryer. The balmy summer breeze tugs at my flowing skirt and I wonder what century I am in. Has anything changed here in five hundred years?

A group of twelve Americans has been furiously writing and editing since arriving last week. When not in the throes of prose they enjoy horseback riding and the best of French food and drink. Just this evening for a special treat, we all took a long stroll out of town to a knoll that overlooks the town. With the sun at our backs, and picnic baskets over our arms, we watched our shadows stretch out along the gravel lane. Arriving at the summit, we sat down to indulge. Bread, baked fresh this morning, delectable, melt-in-your-mouth cheeses, fancy meat patties, and fruit for all. Everyone was in high spirits. As we ate and talked, laughter rang out all the way to the town below. Long after the sun had set, with darkness already upon us, we grabbed our now empty baskets and trudged the mile home.

Back at the café, the guests still had enough energy for a reading, our traditional evening activity. One of the guests, Ellie, a confident, older woman, stood to read her work. She was just beginning to show the signs of aging, with silvering hair and wrinkles radiating from gentle eyes. She carried a bit too much weight, but held herself with elegance and was unconditionally kind. Just this afternoon she had insisted on packing the picnic baskets with Iris and me, saying she felt the need to help. She was a strong and able woman with fascinating stories about a life spent abroad. Iris and I listened from the kitchen while washing dishes as Ellie started to read her dreamy poems about our town of Montalieu. Then it happened. There was a pause in her reading, a crash, and a scream. Poppy ran to the door of the kitchen and froze as the color drained out of her face and into her eyes. Those strangely glittering eyes looked at me with horror.

Somehow I found myself out in the main room, chaos surrounding me. I stood there, a still island amidst a churning sea of panicked activity. Eleven normally levelheaded American adults had completely lost their minds. They were screaming, crying, and running in circles. The echo of the crash still resounded in us. It had been the sound of Ellie striking the floor as she collapsed, hard. In the middle of reading her work, she bent over as if to correct some misspelled word and went limp, fell to the floor, and stopped breathing.

One … Two … Three … The emergency technician's hundred and fifty pounds came down hard on her motionless chest. On the floor next to him a woman hunched over the gaping mouth and forced her own breath into the still lungs. The world was in slow motion as the two volunteers continued ceaselessly. One. Two. Three. They clung to CPR as though the world might stop if they broke their rhythm. But they were wrong; it was too late. The world had already stopped for Ellie.

Spinning around this hub of pain and desperation were the other guests, all considerably older and more experienced than I. Still, they seemed to have no sense of death's reality—no way to face what had just happened. They held on to the hope that it would all be better soon. Yet I somehow recognized mortality when it looked up at me from the floor. There is no doctor in the town; we could only wait for the emergency crew. And with them came a new surge of hope and a gasp of relief. But I grew calm in the face of panic; perhaps numb is more accurate. And I had already calculated the odds. The body that had been Ellie had not breathed a single breath for at least thirty minutes. Even if the emergency crew could get her to breathe, she would never be well again. A body deprived of oxygen for half an hour was no longer a body Ellie would like to live within. I already understood that it was over.

During the following day, as the remaining guests finished up and prepared to leave, I felt myself an invisible witness. People were sad and they thought it was for Ellie. Yes maybe, but more likely the sadness was for each of us. Ellie was not the one in pain. She was the only one who was not suffering … she was gone, long gone. Her sudden death left me with a sense of the insignificance of my own life in a vast and mysterious world. We were the ones left to feel the pain, the fear, and to voice the many unanswered questions left in her wake. Who knows when I will take my final breath. And how will that question affect the rest of my life?

When people ask me what I did during the summer before my junior year in high school, I have a hard time answering. To say I worked in France leaves too much out. Yet to say more is to open up a precarious place of surging emotions where I cannot lightly tread. How do I speak casually on the street corner of life-changing events? How do I describe the image of a vibrant woman I knew lying cold and dead on the floor? I can't talk about it yet. The sound of that count—one … two … three …—still echoes too loudly in my dreams.

Hate Me

She was a toothpick,
straight and tall.
She was an angry girl,
never talked at all.
She was alone and scared.
nobody cared.
She had thoughts and desires,
she never shared.
If you had asked,
if you had listened,
you would understand,
all I had visioned.
Question me no more,
just push me to the floor.
I choose not to communicate,
because all you give to me is hate.
Pick me up and throw me back down,
my screaming for help is the only sound.

2/28/00

Awaiting

Beautified transition
seclusion and remission.
Visit me in a furious rage,
help me break free of my cage.
Care no more of life and dreams,
your troubled heart has been ripped
At the seams.
Your anxious awaiting of love,
and true friends,
is a flame in the wind.
it has to end.

2/28/00

Changing World

A victim bled
The killer's blood.
What's left of our world now?
All there is
Is changing things.
And Hate
Including greed.
All you can see
Is what you want.
But love is what you need.

Free your mind,
Your patience weak.
Request for peace.
Please don't speak…
A dire spare breath for air.
Left in the dark and unmarked.

You're a freedom fighter.
Pressure darkens,
The heart grows cold.
I hate you, don't you know?
Your hand is warm.
Your face is pale.
Please overcome all your hell.
Wealth and fear
The monsters are near.
The depth is overwhelming….

11/4/99

Fading

Fade fast and die slow.
It's probably the life of the love that you know.
Kiss the ashes of the dust in the wind.
You might think you'll die tomorrow,
But really who knows when?

2/28/00

Poems By Loretta Rose Johnson

Loretta Rose Johnson is thirteen and has three brothers, two older and one younger. She lives with her mother and younger brother in Waldoboro, Maine. Loretta likes poetry because it helps her express herself.

Darkness

Darkness surrounds me.
I can't find my way.
There is no conclusion,
To my overwhelming day.
It always lives on,
It meaning the pain and the fear.
Closer to death,
I feel hell is drawing me near.
Then once for a second,
I glanced at you,
I felt my discouraging
days were through.
You seemed to understand me,
When I knew I didn't make sense.
When I complained about everything,
You didn't like me any less.
We both acted,
as if we had something going on,
But somewhere along the line,
We must have both thought wrong.
The phone calls stopped coming in.
I rarely heard your voice.
You never made an attempt to talk to me,
And this was not my choice.
If you were to read this,
I hope you would undertsand,
That I miss you so.
You treated me great then left me alone,
Tell me how could you
Stoop so low?

2/28/00

Nat

I heard the people talking
When the realization came,
How crazy you really are.
You seem so sweet,
So innocent, so perfect,
From afar.

You've overcome
Most everything else.
How hard it must be
to overcome yourself.
I know you don't understand
What you hold inside.
I promise you someday
You will realize,
Through your troubled thoughts
There is Beauty
In its own disguise.

I know I saw something special
When I glanced into your eyes.
I never really knew you,
But I hoped I would.
I could try now to understand you.
I really think I should.
It must seem
Unbelievable that anyone
Can feel
What you're going through.
But behind
This smile and happy face,
I feel crazy too!

3/2/00

A DIFFERENT EDUCATION

BY Jeffrey S. Cramer

Kazia was learning to add. "What is three and five?" I began.

"Eight," she replied.

"What is two and four?"

"Six."

"Great. What is six and three?"

"Four."

My eyebrows went up slightly. "Four?" I asked.

"It's a miracle!" she answered. She was right, it was a miracle, but the miracle was not that six and three after centuries of equaling nine somehow now equaled four but that, given that she knew she was wrong, she was not embarrassed. She did not try to guess at a new sum quickly until she hit the right one. She confidently made a joke and then proceeded, after we were done laughing, to try again. Being wrong was okay sometimes. It was not the end of the world, although for me, when I was young, it was certainly close.

I can recall the embarrassment of being wrong in a classroom. I might be told to stand up. I might be told to stand in the hall. The day of the dunce cap was not that far behind. The teacher might have a belittling remark about my not paying attention or ask me to repeat the question I only half-heard while thirty pairs of eyes, hanging over thirty smirking mouths, watched intently. The answer was not what they were intent on. It was the fact that if I was told to sit down, they might be told to stand up and all eyes would turn on them.

If you were right, you were right, and that was the end of it, unless of course you were right a little too often, in which case you became labeled as a "smarty-pants," "nerd" or "teacher's pet." If you were wrong, you were a fool, and your wrong answer, if excelling in wrongness, might take on mythic proportions as it became part of schoolyard folklore.

"John said that plastic grows on plastic trees!"

"Betty said fish don't drown because they can hold their breath a long time."

If you were crowned a particularly great fool, your name would then become a further hook for ridicule.

"Hey, Scotty. Wipe my ass, Scotty tissues."

"Ronald. Hey, Ronald McDonald, burger-brain!"

In time we learned that mistakes are things to be ashamed of, hidden if possible, and that, if you happened to have the upper hand, it may be the best time to kick the person who is down. It makes good business sense, as all adults know, and helps make the world go round to take advantage and make sure you come out on top. It is a dog-eat-dog world. Competition is what makes it all worthwhile and the purpose of competition is to win at all costs, to come out ahead, be first, be best. The trouble is that if you have a classroom of twenty children and you have one winner, you have nineteen losers.

To accept that we live in a dog-eat-dog world is to accept our situation as blindly as those who believe that boys will be boys and that girls will be girls and refuse to try to make this a little better place in which to live. That we now live in a world where, albeit slowly, boys can be sensitive without being sissies and girls can play baseball without being butch shows that our consciousness can change, even if it is only one child at a time.

Although my wife, Julia, and I are not unaware of the competitiveness that surrounds us, we do not want our children to feel at the end of every task begun that if they haven't won, they have lost; if they haven't

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accomplished, they have failed. Certainly our children are being deprived of some aspects of competitive socialization by our choosing to minimize the rivalry that is everywhere prevalent, but we will have to live with the consequences. If our children grow up just a little more compassionate and respectful, perhaps a little more sensitive and responsible, we have only ourselves to blame.

Although these truths may not be self-evident and, like any generalization, they do not hold true for everyone, still we do not want either Kazia or Zoë learning these lessons of competition and contention so early in their lives, whether they are being taught outright or subliminally. If they have to learn something about hard knocks, they will have to learn it later. Childhood is a time for exploring, being free, being open, but the stigma of being wrong quickly changes that, making it more important to be right than interested, more important to win than be fair, more important to shine than be responsible.

When I am asked if Kazia is going into kindergarten, as if this were the only choice, I respond, "No, she's homeschooled." Sometimes I get looks of confusion; other times, questions aimed to make me see the errors of our ways. Although there has been an increase in the number of homeschoolers every year since the early 1980s, there is still a long way to go before it becomes as commonplace as other formerly foreign things such as bagels or pizza. I use the term "homeschooled" loosely, in the broadest possible context, to include all children who are not enrolled in either a public or private, formally structured institution of learning; the notion here incorporates such terms as "unschooled," "natural learning," "experience-based learning" and "child-led education."

Many parents of schooled children, whether those children are publicly or privately schooled, feel threatened or challenged by the presence of homeschooling families. They hear an implied, and sometimes spoken, criticism by a parent choosing to withdraw her or his child from the school system that they, the schooling family, accept. Like discussions of religion or politics, debates about homeschooling can quickly become fuel for a feud as real as that involving the Hatfields and McCoys. Although we live in a country founded on certain freedoms, we are not necessarily tolerant toward those freedoms which challenge or question whatever the commonly held beliefs are at the time, and we work hard to either absorb or, if that fails, dismiss, or even punish, through legal action or social exclusion, those who won't conform.

Although we do not choose to send our children to school, I do not wish to completely disparage those who do. I don't want our children to say, as Margaret Mead did, "My grandmother wanted me to have an education, so she kept me out of school," but more simply, "My parents wanted me to have a different education." I understand that for some school is the best, and for many the only, possible option. For us, homeschooling is the best and therefore the only option. In the same way that simply the presence of a vegetarian can sometimes make a carnivore defensive, our reasons for homeschooling might appear as a criticism against persons who choose not to homeschool, but this defensive position on their part is only the nature of the beast. A plus on one side must always appear as a minus on the other.

When we first thought about the idea of being a homeschooling family, I began to ask the question: what is a homeschooler? I wanted a clear-cut answer such as "A homeschooler is one who ..." What I found was a question as unanswerable as "What is a woman?" "What is a Native American?" "What is a Jew?" There were too many answers. There were no answers.

What I found was that as soon as I began to define my idea of a homeschooler around one homeschooling parent such as Amy, I would look at David and see something different, so I would redefine and look at Jenny, and then back at Amy, and need to redefine again. Then there were the different methods: some persons followed a strict adult-led curriculum by virtually

recreating the classroom in their home; some followed a freer, more child-led style, joining in whatever educational adventure their child wished to pursue; and many fell somewhere in between.

The redefinitions I created were endless. All or most homeschoolers shared certain general characteristics, but their motives were individual. All or most homeschooling parents tried to fulfill certain roles, but their needs and the needs of their children were all personal. Similar goals may have been set, but their time frames were all unique. At best, when all was said and done, when all the questions were asked and all inconclusive conclusions considered, I could only define them (soon to be us) as a group of individuals whose most common interest, like that held by most parents, was the welfare of their children, even if their ideas of what best constitutes that welfare are disparate and sometimes diametrically opposed both to those within the group and to those without. Their common ground was nebulous, at best.

And for the homeschooled children I knew it was the same: Emily, Ari, Sarah, Eli…Their needs were so distinct, what they were getting out of being homeschooled was so dissimilar, that I came to no conclusion other than that, if the needs of two children in one homeschooling family were so vastly different, if their interests and pace of learning and exploration were so varied, then it could not be possible for one teacher in one classroom not only to meet their needs but even to discover what those needs might be.

Despite the embarrassments, the pain and the less-than-ideal opportunities for learning, I harbored some fond memories of my school years, so the idea of not sending our children to school was still somewhat foreign to my nature. Yet, as our children slowly approached school age, I began to look back over my own schooling, however cherished at times, and question the skills that I had developed to cope with or otherwise make my way through school: my adeptness at staying in the good graces of my teachers; my defense mechanisms that protected me from embarrassment; my ability to learn what was needed for the grade; my techniques for not getting caught at whatever I should not have been doing; my drive to compete and win.

I learned in school that worth comes from elsewhere, from outside. What we all strove for sitting in that classroom, when all was said and done, was not knowledge, but praise, the star on the forehead, the holy "A." We learned because if we learned we got a pat on the back. This is not to say that praise is an unworthy thing, but when we value what we are doing solely for the praise from others, then our motives, intentionally or not, are wrong, self-demeaning and unhealthy. What I hope our unschooled children will come to understand is that the best value placed on what they are doing comes from within themselves. Until self-approval is deemed higher than the approval of others, there is often little value to what we do

Kazia is learning to read. The first thing she did was to memorize her favorite books. She would sit down with one of them and pretend to read. As she recited the book from memory, she would try to pick out the words on the page. Sometimes she would be right, often she would be wrong, but soon her ability to recognize the letters and match some of the word sounds with the letter sounds gave her the ability to point to each word correctly in turn.

Eventually she began to know when something was wrong. She couldn't quite remember the right word and would have to guess, but her guess was often an unconscious rudimentary reading of the word. She may have felt as if she were guessing, and in some cases she was, but in other cases her brain, without any fanfare, was reading. She didn't know it, but she was beginning to read.

We don't grill her with rules of grammar. We don't teach her which letters are silent when, which vowels are long and which short, until needed. When a word has a peculiar spelling which doesn't reflect its sound, we just tell her the word so she won't waste time getting frustrated over it. When she is stuck, we help her sound things out by reminding her of other words that are spelled similarly or maybe, at this time, teaching her some rule. I write her Seussian-type capitalized rhymes to have fun with—"I HAD A PIN. IT WAS THIN. IT WAS A THIN PIN. THIS THIN PIN HAD KIN. IT WAS THE THIN PIN'S TWIN." They are short enough to read through and long enough to give her a sense of accomplishment.

When I bring books home from the library, she will sit on the floor with them all spread out before her, then pick out one with pictures that appeal to her and try to read. Each day, each hour, she propels herself on to a new level. Like climbing in our backyard or walking on a balance beam, each day her reading adventures bring her a new accomplishment. Each little setback remains little and temporary. Each minor advance is a step along the way to new levels of confidence and joy.

Self-motivated interest, as I have come to observe, is the strongest impetus to a child's, or anyone's, learning. It is that which makes the idea of child-led learning so appealing. Discovering something on one's own, without being led to it, without being taught it, can fill a person with curiosity and a natural desire to learn. "It is a miracle," Albert Einstein once said, "that curiosity survives formal education." Thoreau tells the story of how his free time in the fields, out of his Concord classroom, led him on to further study:

> I well remember with what a sense of freedom and spirit of adventure I used to take my way across the fields with my pail, some years later, toward some distant hill or swamp, when dismissed for all day, and I would not now exchange such an expression of all my being for all the learning in the world.... I suddenly knew more about my books than if I had never ceased studying them. I

> found myself in a schoolroom where I could not fail to see and hear things worth seeing and hearing—where I could not help getting my lesson—for my lesson came to me. Such experience often repeated was the chief encouragement to go to the Academy and study a book at last. (1980, 248)

This excerpt provides just one example of how experience leads to learning, not the other way around. The real world versus the world of the classroom: there is no competition. Perhaps, in part, this is why children in a classroom are often made to sit with their backs to the windows.

In the middle of my junior year in high school, we moved. The school I had been attending was very progressive; my new school, much less so. What I had learned in my math class in the first few months of my junior year in my old school put me far ahead of where most other students were in my new one. It took two months for my new school to catch up. Since I already knew what was being taught, although I had been just an average student in my old class, I appeared a genius in my new environment.

For two months I could sit back and not have to exercise one brain cell, and so I didn't. There was nothing to challenge me in that classroom, so for fifty minutes my brain shut down at least as far as mathematics was concerned. Sure I thought about other things—my girlfriend, Saturday night, the latest Stones album—sure I wrote poems with half a brain, doodled doodles with the other half, but these things I did almost on automatic pilot. If I were caught, even though I knew the answer to any question the teacher could ask me at this point, I would be reprimanded, showing that order was of a higher consideration than knowledge. There was little to excite my interest because there was no opportunity for me to work ahead of my classmates at whatever my own pace might be. Boredom and learning became synonymous.

What I learned most in this math class was about the lowest common denominator. I was appalled by this equation. When it comes to Kazia and Zoë's education, we do not want the lowest common denominator to dominate their learning. Each is to be the only denominator in her own life.

"The chief, if unadmitted, purpose of the school system," Wendell Berry wrote, "is to keep children away from home as much as possible" (1981, 157). In 1995, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 60% of all children under the age of six were in some kind of non-parental arrangement, fewer than one-third of whom were in the care of a relative. As if school were not enough, we have invented preschool, and if that were not enough, we have created day care institutes, euphemistically referred to as school by many parents, that start almost from day one. Granted that some home situations necessitate the use of these institutions and that for some families there are no other options; still, it is difficult for me to accept that 60% of all children live in households in which some kind of home care is not possible.

Berry also wrote that "Parents want their children kept out of their hair; education is merely a by-product, not overly prized" (1981, 157). My wife and I knew that the purpose of sending our own children to school was, first and foremost, for them to receive a good education; yet, every mainstream and not-so-mainstream publication has carried articles about the failures of the public school system. Just look at reading skills alone: a 1990 study released by then Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos reported that 42% of all thirteen year olds lacked reading skills at what is considered, by those who consider such things, the appropriate level and that 58% of seventeen year olds were not reading at their appropriate age level. Seven years later, in 1997, Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley stated, "Forty percent of our children are not reading as well as they should by the end of the third grade."[1] The following year, in the Fifth Annual State of American Education Address, Riley relegated this failure rate to the euphemism, "Reading scores are not where we want them."[2]

If parents are shown these facts and still send their children into the schools, one has to at least question their purpose. If your auto mechanic has a 40% failure rate, would you bring your car to him? If a third of your attorney's clients go to jail, would you want her defending you? If your pediatrician loses a quarter of his patients, would you still put your children in his care? Then why, if education is the purpose of schools and the schools are shown to be failing at such rates, do parents continue to send their children there? This is a question I can only ask. Or perhaps the better, although more frightening, question is: What is an acceptable failure rate where the welfare of our children is concerned?

Occasionally my wife and I hear words of support from parents who admire what we do, although they seem to feel that, for whatever reasons—economical, psychological, physical, sociological—they cannot teach at home. There are those who, with a little encouragement from family or friends, might give homeschooling a try. Sometimes, however, a reaction is vehement. One person asked, "How can you do that to your children?"

There is an apocryphal story about Thoreau, who, when in jail for not paying a poll tax supporting the war with Mexico, was asked, "Henry, why are you here?" He replied, "Why are you not here?"

How can we do that to our children? I am tempted to paraphrase Thoreau's response: "How can you not?"

We want to regain responsibility, to actually share the mantle of responsibility with our children, for not only their education but also their lives. Learning at home is not just about learning to read or write. It is not just about learning how to add two numbers together or knowing why a whale is not a fish. It is about learning to live, to interact, to be a part of a community that is comprised not just of children doing children things, but also of people doing people things. Not being

labeled and thereby limited—as a student in a particular grade, as a jock or a nerd, or even merely as a child—is part of what homeschooling has to offer.

Homeschooling encourages children to question and then to search for solutions and answers. It encourages children to challenge first and then accept, or not, afterwards. It enables children to follow their instinctual desire for learning and discovery and to work toward a fulfillment of their personal needs and interests. Homeschooling empowers them to explore with the sole purpose, not of achieving teacher or even parental approval, but of achieving knowledge, understanding, and a love of learning that will not stop when the bell rings.

Notes

1. http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/02-1997/StateofED.html
2. http://www.ed.gov/Speeches/980217.html

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Diver Dan's BIG Mistake

BY NICK ELLIS

Dan is a tall, skinny man with glasses, a marine biologist who worked for LMBL (Local Marine Biology Laboratory) and had been given many hard and dangerous assignments that included studying Great White sharks and how they mate. He accomplished this by killing a Great White and turning this into a shark suit! Dan has just come back from an assignment that was to find out why squids shoot out only so much ink.

Early the next morning Dan awoke with a start to find his dog Tobi lying next to him licking his forehead. "Get off Tobi," laughed Dan. Dan walked to the bathroom to brush his teeth. When he looked in the mirror he was bewildered. There was baking soda all over his forehead. Dan didn't know what to think. He looked at his bed and sure enough there was baking soda all over it. Dan looked at the ground. There were paw prints all around the bed. Dan figured that Tobi had gotten the box of baking soda he kept on his bed in case Tobi had an accident. Dan yelled so loud I think his great, great, great, great grandma even heard him under all that dirt. "Tobiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii!" yelled Dan. Dan was going to punish Tobi, but when he looked at the clock it was 7:46. "Work starts at 7:50 and it takes me 5 minutes to get there!" he said. "Bye Tobi, see you in a bit!" shouted Dan as he shot out the door.

Dan arrived at work 2 minutes late, but a sound that no man wants to hear reached Dan's ears. "Dannnnnnnnn!" roared his boss Mr. Johnson. Dan jogged to his boss's office and with a deep breath entered. "Dan, sit down, I have something very important to tell you," said Mr. Johnson. Dan gulped.

"You have been asked to take another assignment; it is to see why Orcas have teeth and eat meat but many other whales have bristles and eat plankton," said Mr. Johnson. Dan was relieved! He was sure he was going to be fired. "Will you take it?" asked Mr. Johnson. "Sure!" exclaimed Dan, almost falling off his chair he was laughing so hard. "Why are you laughing?" asked Mr. Johnson. "I thought you were going to fire me," said Dan who had now calmed down. "Me? Never!" said Mr. Johnson who was now getting a little hysterical himself. "You're the best worker I have!" added Mr. Johnson. "I'd better be off then," said Dan as he strode out of Mr. Johnson's office and back to his house to start packing. "Be at the dock tomorrow at 9:35 A.M. sharp!" came the sound of Mr. Johnson's voice as Dan left the building.

The next day Dan was at the dock at 9:30, checking his bags to make sure he had packed everything. At 9:35 sharp Mr. Johnson showed up. "The boat leaves at 10:00 A.M.," said Mr. Johnson. "Do you have everything?" asked Mr. Johnson. "Yep," answered Dan. "Do you want a cup of coffee?" asked Mr. Johnson. "Sure," said Dan.

At 9:55 Dan boarded the ship. The ship left the dock at 10:00 sharp. After Dan unpacked his things, he went to see the captain. The captain was a stout young man. Dan guessed he was around the age of 35. "How long do you think it will take for us to get about 55 miles out?" asked Dan, anxious to start his assignment. "I reckon about one day if we go at top speed," replied the captain, who had a southern

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Nick Ellis is ten years old and lives in Falls Church, Virginia.

accent. “A whole day,” Dan complained. “Afraid so,” said the captain. “This here ship wasn’t made for going fast,” added the captain. “Wake me up tomorrow as soon as it gets light,” said Dan. “OK,” said the captain.

Next Dan took a tour of the boat, then ate lunch, then read a book until he fell asleep. The next morning the captain woke him up as promised. Dan got dressed and went onto the deck. There were gray clouds all over the sky; it had started to drizzle. The captain walked up to Dan and cautioned, “There is going to be a severe thunderstorm today. You should be inside, sir.” “I’m fine,” replied Dan. “Oh, and by the way are we there yet?” asked Dan. “I’m afraid not,” said the captain. “We had a little delay last night,” said the captain. “What kind of delay?” asked Dan. “Bad weather,” replied the captain. “Oh,” said Dan. “I’ll be out here a little longer,” said Dan.

“Fine with me,” said the captain.

About an hour later it started to storm; there were big waves and everything a big storm has. Dan was going inside when “Boom!” a gigantic wave struck the side of the ship, throwing Dan onto the railing. “Boom!” another wave hit the ship. This time Dan was washed overboard but was lucky enough to grab the railing. Then a third wave crashed into the ship. The impact made Dan lose his grip, and he went plunging into the icy water. The last thing Dan remembered before he was knocked out on a rock was grabbing a board that was ripped off the ship.

The next day was sunny and warm. The storm had stopped but the sea was still pretty rough. When Dan woke up he felt a growing pain on the side of his head. “Where am I, what am I doing, why am I in the water?” asked Dan. Then it all came back to him, Tobi, his assignment, the ship, the storm. Dan then realized that he had lost his glasses. He guessed they had fallen off in the storm. He thought he might find the ship if he swam forward, and so he did. About an hour later Dan saw something. He couldn’t see it clearly without his glasses, so he went in for a closer look. When he was about 30 feet away he could make out the shape of a fin, a grey glistening fin. “A dolphin!” shouted Dan with delight. He started swimming for it as fast as he could.

That was Dan’s big mistake.

Finding Their Voices, Finding Themselves

An Interview with Nancy Gruver

By Samara Miles and Richard J. Prystowsky

PHOTOS BY RICHARD PRYSTOWSKY

This past June, Samara Miles, *Paths'* Teen and Young Adult Editor, traveled with editor Richard Prystowsky to Duluth, Minnesota, for an interview with Nancy Gruver, founder and publisher of the groundbreaking international publications *New Moon®: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams and New Moon® Network: For Adults Who Care About Girls.*

Nancy Gruver is a national leader in the movement to empower girls and foster their creativity and self-confidence. Edited by girls eight to fourteen years old, who select creative material submitted by girls and adults worldwide, *New Moon®* has won international acclaim and is the recipient of a number of awards, including five Parent's Choice Foundation Awards (including Best Children's Magazine, 1995, 1997, and 1999), five Educational Press Association of America Design and Editorial Awards, and the *Utne Reader*'s 1994 Alternative Press Award. Gruver is the recipient of, among other honors, the 1998 YWCA "Women Entrepreneur" award, the 1997 "Women of Distinction" award from the National Assn. for Women in Education, and the Feminist Majority Foundation's "Feminist of the Year" Award for 1993. *New Moon*'s editors were named winners of the Center for Women's Policy Studies' 1995 Jessie Bernard Wise Women Award.

Gruver's goal is to develop and publicize strategies that support girls in holding onto their unique dreams and voices. To this end, she has helped to publish a series of four *New Moon* books for girls (Crown, 1999-2000), which, as she says, "continue this vision." She has also helped to launch "Shoot for the Moon," a girl-run television show in development for public television, which is planned for 2001.

In keeping with *New Moon®*'s unique model of putting girls in charge of a collaborative process involving girls and adults—a process that Gruver notes "is a promising counterbalance to societal pressures which lead many adolescent girls to abandon their dreams and silence their voices"—Samara and Richard had decided that Samara ought to be in charge of this interview. Although Richard did ask questions, his role, essentially, was to support Samara's endeavor. Nancy was, not unexpectedly, fully supportive of this plan of action.

Be Who You Are!

Sam: The *New Moon* mission statement says: *"New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams* is the international magazine for every girl who wants her voice heard and her dreams taken seriously. With girl editors ages 8 to 14 and girl contributors from all over the world, *New Moon* celebrates girls, explores the passage from girl to woman, and builds healthy resistance to gender inequities. The *New Moon* girl is true to herself, and *New Moon* helps her as she pursues her unique path in life, moving confidently out into the world."

To what extent do you think *New Moon* magazine has lived up to its mission, and what changes have you had to make over the years?

NG: We've lived up to our mission very well, I think. We have really stayed true to the idea that girls know a lot, and that what's missing is a way for girls to bring that knowledge into the world, in a way that gets respected. That's really what *New Moon* is all about. *New Moon* is about supporting girls, helping them feel that they know who they are. They know what's going on. They know what they should be doing with their lives. The world puts all kinds of pressure on them to change, to be somebody different, to fit into somebody else's idea—a lot of other people's ideas—of who they should be. Put into a mold, basically. Girls don't get a lot of support for not fitting into the mold, in our overall culture.

The idea of *New Moon* is to be that place for girls that says, "Who you are is who you should be! You don't need to change. You don't need to figure out what's wrong with you. The world maybe needs to change." Part of staying true to yourself, and I think this is a very important thing to me about the magazine, is not just knowing who you are, and keeping that all closed up inside; it's knowing who you are, still being part of the world, and working to change the world, if it needs to be changed, to make it be a place that will honor and respect everybody the way they are. That's a very long-winded answer, but I do think that *New Moon* really does live up to its mission.

Sometimes it's a bumpy path, and there are challenges along the way, things that are very difficult for us to figure out. For example, in one issue the theme was "Rites of Passage." One of the girls on the editorial board was aware of some of the rites of passage in some parts of the world, where female genital mutilation is considered to be how you become a woman. This girl thought it was an important thing for this issue to talk about, especially since this happens to girls who are the ages of our readers. Well, that was a very, very difficult issue to figure out how to handle, how to address in a way that wasn't terrifying to girls, but also in a way that didn't pretty it up, or minimize how traumatic and horrible an experience it can be.

So things like that—being true to what the girls, our readers, and our editors want—sometimes require us, the adults who are working on *New Moon*, to really trust. We had a lot of doubts over whether this was an appropriate topic to have an article about in the magazine, and we were very concerned that we were going to have complaints, mostly from parents who would be saying, "Girls who are eight and nine years old shouldn't be reading about this."

S: Did you in fact publish something about it?

NG: We did! It was in the January/February '98 issue, and we went through about—conservatively—six versions of the article! We had the girls on the editorial board reading it and reviewing it very, very closely, as we went along, and it changed quite a bit from the beginning to the end. At the beginning it was pretty much a description of what female genital mutilation is. And that was very graphic, and very scary, and very frightening. It is a horrible thing to describe. The girls on the editorial board felt that it was too scary, just too awful.

We had a sidebar about a group in Kenya, in a village that has developed an alternative to female genital mutilation, which is called "Circumcision Through Words." (In places where it is practiced, rather than being called female genital mutilation it is commonly called female circumcision.) So, we ended up focusing the article, in the end, on this alternative program called "Circumcision Through Words." We still described what actually happens in FGM [female genital mutilation], but that is not the whole focus of the article.

A very important thing to us is to give girls ways they can take action. And so, in that particular article, we listed how they could support a program that's working to spread this alternative ritual to other communities, and whom they could write to about female genital mutilation. So, the thing that I think is probably the hardest is that whole balance between nurturing what's on the inside of girls and helping them bring it out into the world and change the world because of it. I think it would be very easy to just stop with the nurturing what's on the inside part. It's a lot harder to bring that into action in the world, and it makes people uncomfortable to do that. However, we think that's part of our job. Because we have an inequitable culture, until it's equitable, people are going to be uncomfortable with the kinds of things that we are concerned about and talking about.

S: Interesting. So *New Moon*'s purpose is not only to express girls' thoughts and complaints and ideas, but also to provide ideas and encouragement for making changes.

NG: Absolutely, yeah, both, because we think that both things are important. We get a fair amount of criticism for the department in the magazine called "How Aggravating," where girls write in about things that they feel are inequitable. We regularly get people complaining to us, typically adults, but occasionally girls will write to us and say, "Oh, they are just whining and complaining. Things aren't so bad, and you know dadadadada, and why don't you ever have anything positive?!" Well, actually, you know, that's one page out of forty-eight pages, but what it's saying to me is that it gets a strong response, and girls love that department. It's consistently one of their favorite things about the magazine. They just love it.

I think they love it because there aren't enough ways for girls to actually say what's true, what they see, and how they feel. Their perspective gets diminished; it gets labeled as "whining" or "complaining" and it is made to seem less important. Many of those things are about justice. It sounds a lot better when you call it "justice" than when you call it "whining and complaining." But our culture views it as whining and complaining in order to silence girls.

Moreover, the culture teaches women and girls to silence themselves. For the culture it is more effective for us to silence ourselves. Otherwise, if somebody else has to silence us, it takes more effort and it creates more conflict. If we will silence ourselves, and not complain about the things that are unfair to us, then it saves the culture a lot of trouble.

But we think that trouble needs to be caused, because we have an inequitable culture, and that's not right, not fair. And, so, the first step to changing that is to recognize it—to notice what is wrong, what needs to change. That's the first step. We'll never change things if we don't realize that they bother us, that they aren't fair. I think it's very, very important even though we get adults who don't like it. Typically, girls love it.

Many adults think, "Well, you're encouraging them to whine; you're encouraging them to complain. Why don't you encourage them to do something positive?" Some people feel uncomfortable about a girl speaking out. They can't get beyond that and see what else is there. We actually started a department called "Howling at the Moon," which is for girls to write in about things that people have done to promote gender justice or gender equity. We get maybe 20% as many submissions to that department as we get to "How Aggravating."

Whenever people complain to us that we don't have enough positive stuff, we try, in a respectful way, to show them that the vast majority of articles in *New Moon* are about good things that are happening, good things that girls are doing, good things that communities are doing. I mean, even that female genital mutilation article is a perfect example. Here's a really horrendous, horrible thing that affects many girls, girls of the same ages as our readers. And yet, most girls, most of our readers, have never heard anything about it. It's invisible. And, at the same time, there's hope. There's change; there are things happening that people are doing through their own individual actions to change that practice, to create an alternative.

Many people think that girls can't really deal with the complexity of those kinds of issues, or with just the bare concept of "On the one hand ... On the other hand ..." Some people think that girls' thinking isn't complicated enough, that they're really not abstract thinkers. Yet, our readers, for the most part, indicate that they can understand the complications and the complexity of things. I think much of the media for kids dumbs things down, but we don't do that.

Girls' Truths

Richard: Do you feel that the criticism about whining and complaining would be there if *New Moon* were a boy's magazine? Are there cultural or ethnic aspects to this problem, in your view?

NG: I think it's definitely a cultural thing. The classic words out of any ten-year-old girl's mouth are, "That's not fair!" How many ten-year-old girls do you know who aren't saying that at least once a day? Why they are saying that is not because they're whiny, and not because they're demanding and expect the whole world to just change to suit them. It's that they can see very clearly that things are not fair. They see that. They have not yet put their blinders on.

Most older girls and most adults have blinders on. We put them on in order to cope, in order to get through our everyday lives. We make compromises, you know. That's part of growing up, inevitably. Ten-year-old girls aren't ready to make those compromises yet, and their clear-sightedness makes adults uncomfortable. It reminds us, particularly adult women, of all the compromises we have made and are still making. We get very uncomfortable with that. Typically, we adult women are the ones who teach girls to stop noticing that stuff, to stop paying attention to it. That has been the role of mothers and aunts and grandmothers in our culture, to teach girls how to silence themselves, to teach girls how to set themselves aside, to teach girls how to put themselves second instead of first.

Well, it's time for us to stop doing that. It's time for us to help girls keep themselves number one, which

PHOTO BY SAMARA MILES

Richard Prystowsky at the Nancy Gruver interview.

That level of involvement amounts to living the mission of bringing girls' voices into the public arena in a way that they get respected and listened to.

doesn't mean they're going to hurt other people and it doesn't mean they don't care about other people. It just means that they're number one. But in order to do that, we have to be able to come to terms with our choices and the things we've done and also the things we've missed out on. We may be jealous. Why should my daughter get all these chances? None of this is conscious, of course. But why should she get to have all this freedom and all this choice and all these opportunities that I didn't get?

Many of us are unwilling to think about and look at those things. I think that there are many unconscious though harmful reasons we buy into what the culture wants us to do. It hurts our daughters; it hurts us. Here we are, adjusting to the culture in a way that is very similar to learning how to wear a corset. The mothers and the grandmothers were the ones who were supposed to teach their daughters how to stop breathing so that they could fit into that corset. Imagine the physical pain of that. It is exactly what is still going on, not with corsets, but with fitting into the culture's mold.

R: It is an interesting metaphor because this is why so many women fainted, and then they were labeled as weak and ...

NG: Hysterical. Yes, absolutely. And I think it happens with boys, as well. I don't have sons, so I don't have that experience, myself, but I certainly know from my husband's talking about it, how squeezed he felt by the culture and its expectations of what he should be, as a boy. Only, to boys I think it happens a lot sooner. It happens to boys when they are three, four, and five years old. It happens to girls at ten and eleven and twelve years old. So the girls fight back, maybe a little more because they are a little older and they have a few more resources, both emotionally and intellectually, at that age.

But boys get that squeeze really early, and then when they get to adolescence, the squeeze slacks off for boys. Girls, however, have more freedom until they get to adolescence, and then they begin to be constrained. I see it as a kind of reverse hourglass effect. And yet, the reality for human beings growing up is that as you get older, you should have more freedom. You should have more ability to test out the world and your place in the world, but our culture doesn't give that equal opportunity to girls because of its fears about them being hurt. Also, if everybody is out there wanting what they want and wanting to put their needs first, that means you have to be in negotiation all the time about whose needs we are going to put first in this particular situation. Whereas, if you have half the population always putting their needs second, it makes for a lot less negotiation, a lot less friction overall, and a lot less trouble. However, it is also a lot less fulfilling for both the people who get their needs put first and for those whose needs come second. I think men and boys are harmed by this just as much as are women.

How the Magazine Is Run

S: *New Moon* is unique in most ways, and one of those ways is that it has an editorial board consisting of pre-teen and teenage girls rather than adults. So, what sorts of problems and differences or advantages have you encountered due to that, especially considering the amount of age bias in this country?

NG: We haven't really faced criticism, and I am not sure if that is because people felt that they shouldn't criticize us for having an editorial board of girls or not. Instead, we do get a fair amount of misunderstanding and sometimes condescension. People think that because the editorial board is girls, it is cute or is a PR thing. They don't understand that it really is true that the girls do the editing and make the decisions. We discovered this misunderstanding when people have come to observe an editorial meeting. Particularly in the early years, reporters would come to our meetings and by the time they had finished watching the meeting, all of them would respond with something like, "Wow! This is just like an editorial meeting at my paper." "Except," as one reporter said to us, "it is a lot more efficient!"

I think that this efficiency comes about because no one is jockeying for advantage, no one is jockeying for the next promotion, or not saying what she thinks because she doesn't want to offend So-And-So. One of the big advantages is that the girls make decisions like this [snaps finger]. Every now and again something will be under discussion that takes a long time for them to decide, but a lot of times they know what they like and they know what they don't like, and it doesn't take them a long time to figure that out.

They meet twice a month, so they work on each issue for what amounts to four meetings. They don't work on just one issue at a time, because different ones are in different stages as they go along. Each meeting is 2 1/2 hours long, so that is not a lot of time, when you think about it. It is essentially like a long day at work, ten hours of work. They make all of the decisions; then, during the week, the two managing editors, who are adults, carry out all of those decisions—take comments back to the writers; work with the cover artists based on the editors' comments; work with the designer, based on their comments; do all of that back and forth, in and out, making sure that everybody has a contract, making sure that everybody gets their magazines after the issue comes out. All of that kind of work is being done by adults.

If in fact the girls were going to do every single thing, from the mundane to the big decisions, it would take so much time. It would take a year to get an issue out. They couldn't do that, and so our role, the role of the adults, is to support their decisions, carry out their decisions. They are the decision makers, but they are not the doers of every single thing.

A lot of people also think that the girls on the editorial board write everything, but they don't. They hardly do any writing, as a matter of fact. They are editors in the much more typical sense of reading, working with the writers to edit a piece and get it to the point that they want it to be. And the writing is, of course, being done by girls from all over the world. We seek them out, sometimes, approach them, or they approach us sometimes.

S: Have you had any problems?

NG: Problems? I would say that the problems are similar to the problems that any publication has, like a story just won't work the way we want it to. One good example is a time when someone sent us a query saying they wanted to write a profile of a Russian girl who performs in a circus with her dad. This was for a father/daughter issue we were doing. The girls liked that idea; they said, "Sure." But

the piece—I don't know if this woman had never read *New Moon*—was like something that might go into *Teen Magazine.* The whole thing was about how she loved American jeans, how she loved fresh fruit in the grocery store, and so on. It was just terrible. The girls said, "Well, we don't like this. Here is what we want. We need to know more about the relationship between her and her father. We want to know about her. We don't know who she is. All that this is about is how she loves being a consumer in America."

So the writer wrote the piece again, but still didn't get to any point of letting us know who she was. So, the Girls Editorial Board (GEB) had to decide, which is one of the few times we have done this, to say, "No. We can't publish this piece. It is not a *New Moon* piece." That was a very difficult decision for them to make. They didn't want to do that. They didn't want to kill it. But they had to. They knew that it wasn't right and that they didn't want it in the magazine.

One of the things I really love is that the editors see the magazine as their magazine. In the very beginning, I had the idea of putting a parents' section in the middle, something that parents could tear out when they got it. I thought the girls would like this so I brought it to the editorial board, told them about the idea and how some other magazines do this, and they looked right at me and said, "If you want a magazine, get your own magazine." So I did, and it became our newsletter, *New Moon Network: For Adults Who Care About Girls.*

That is when I knew we had gone around the corner—it was their magazine. I mean, it was my idea in the first place, but it became their magazine. And even though the editorial board keeps changing, because when you turn fifteen you have to retire from the board, the girls who are on the board feel this really strong sense of ownership, and that comes through, I think. It comes through on the pages, and it can't be simulated. It is there because they really are making the decisions. They are *New Moon.*

S: How cool! What a feeling!

NG: Yes! And they tell us that the older they get, the more they realize what an unusual experience it was, which is one of the things that is really interesting to me. Some of our former editors are now in college, or even out of college. The oldest one is 21 now. They knew that working on *New Moon* was special at the time, because they felt that it was a different kind of environment, a different kind of relationship with the adults, all ideas that come out of unschooling—understanding and jointly held responsibility. But they didn't really understand just how unusual their experience was until they got a bit older, had more experience, and more perspective.

One of the girls who went to college last year told me that there were a couple of people in her dorm who had gotten *New Moon* for years, and that they were so excited to meet her because she was one of the founding editors. She said, "It was just so neat, but it was the kind of thing that I didn't really have a sense of when I was doing it." When the girls are doing it, they are doing it, they know that the magazine goes out to 30,000 people, but that's not very real to them because they don't meet those people very often. Most of their contact with readers comes from reading the letters, so to meet someone, years later, gives them a whole new perspective.

S: How do you spread the word about the magazine? Have you had problems with circulation, especially based on the fact that *New Moon* is so different?

NG: Absolutely. The majority of our subscriptions come from word of mouth or "white mail," which is when we don't know where the order came from or why the person placed the order. We depend a lot on word of mouth.

One of the big challenges for any children's magazine is low renewal rates. The average in the children's magazine industry is about a 33% renewal rate, so that means that they lose 67% of their subscribers every single year. Ours is a little higher. It ranges between a 45 and 50% renewal rate, which is excellent.

Right now we have 23,000 subscribers. This year we will have to get 12,000 to 15,000 new subscribers

PHOTO BY RICHARD PRYSTOWSKY

Samara Miles and Nancy Gruver.

We are still trying to persuade the Girl Scouts that they should stop working with *Girls' Life Magazine*. It's a horrendous magazine for girls which has adopted the rhetoric of *New Moon* but actually still pursues what other teen girl magazines do—teaching girls how to fit in, not how to be themselves.

just to stay there. That's a huge amount when you think about it. It's a real challenge every single year to find those new people who either haven't heard about the magazine or who have heard about it but haven't ordered for some reason.

Although we depend upon word of mouth, we have used PR effectively. When we first put the magazine together, I spent a lot of time before the first issue came out, doing library research for a press release to newspapers and magazines all over the country. We also wanted to get mentioned in a certain magazine that we thought would be interested in a feminist magazine for girls. We knew that we weren't going to be appealing to the mass market, that *New Moon* was going to interest a specific niche of people.

When the first issue was published, we sent one copy to the editor of the magazine we were targeting for coverage, but we heard nothing, heard nothing, heard nothing. I would call and leave a message, but no one would ever call back. I never got to talk to anybody. One day I had the idea of sending a copy to every single person listed on the masthead, on the same day, in different envelopes, so that maybe somebody would say, "Oh, did you see this?" and then talk about it. Well, it worked. We couldn't afford to hire somebody who could really do PR to call and call and call them, you know. So we did that kind of thing. We used creative common sense, but also kind of crazy tactics.

UN Women's Conference in Beijing

NG: We have also done a lot of action projects over the years that were not done in order to get PR, but that generated a lot of PR for us. For example, we took a delegation of girls to the Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, and that generated a huge amount of coverage from media all over the place. We had the largest delegation of girls at the conference. However, when that idea started, it wasn't at all about PR. It started because Angela Davis came to speak in Duluth for International Women's Day in 1994, and the only media interview she did was with *New Moon.* She didn't do any interviews with news reporters. We had a connection with somebody at the Women's Studies Department [at the University of Minnesota, Duluth], and that is how we arranged the interview. We did the interview after her talk, in the midst of a reception, so it was a really quick and informal thing, but the girls had their questions, and one of the questions they asked her was, "What are one or two of the events in your life that influenced you to do the work that you do?"

And she mentioned two things, one of which was going to the women's conference in Nairobi (1985). When some of the girls asked what it was like, she described a huge group of women all dancing together, even though they couldn't really talk to each other because of language differences. She went on to say that there was one of these conferences happening again the next year in China. That is where the idea came from. We heard this, and it sounded like a really cool thing, and we started from there to figure out how to do it. It took us a year-and-a-half to figure it out, to raise the money and find out how you actually get to go to a UN conference—which was a whole Ph.D. project on its own.

As the project went along, I would call people and try to find out what there was for girls at the conference, and they would say, "Do you mean young women?" And I would say, "No, I actually mean girls. You know, ten year olds, twelve year olds." They would respond, "There is nothing for girls to do! There are no activities for children and no child care at these conferences. Girls don't come to this." And I said, "Oh."

So I came back to the girls and said, "Well, here's the scoop: they don't have anything for girls at these conferences." They said, "Well, what do you mean?" And I said, "Well, that's what they told me." And they said, "Well, we don't want child care. We don't want activities. We just want to go to the conference and be part of the conference." Their response made us even more determined to do it.

That level of involvement amounts to living the mission of bringing girls' voices into the public arena in a way that they get respected and listened to. Our next big project was in 1998, which was the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. We took a different group of girls to Seneca Falls, New York, and they wrote a "Girls' Declaration of Sentiments." [See sidebar. Editor's note: Following the Seneca Falls Convention, in 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an early feminist who was one of the key organizers of this event, wrote a document entitled "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions." Modeled on the Declaration of Independence, this document outlined a number of important issues and goals pertaining to women's rights.]

We formed a non-profit to take the girls to China; under the auspices of this non-profit, we are now planning an International Girls Conference for next summer in Minnesota.

R: Do you support yourselves outside of subscriptions?

NG: We are completely supported by subscription revenues, and it is a challenge, actually. We now have seven full-time, adult staff. Because of the child labor laws, we can't pay the girls until they are fifteen, the age at which they are off the board. We didn't realize that when we set the age limit. So, they don't get paid, but when we have a year in which the company is profitable, we buy savings bonds as gifts for the girls. We can do that.

We are very frugal. You can see our office. We pay great attention to costs, bid out our printing and mailing every year to make sure we are getting the best price that we can get. None of us makes very much money to work here. We do it for the mission, basically. Anyone who comes to work here is not coming to make a lot of money.

R: Why is the magazine and the editorial board geared to ages eight to fourteen?

NG: The idea is to bridge the time from when girls are really still full of themselves, really connected and know who they are—typical of eight-, nine-, and ten-year-old girls—to that time when many girls have lost track of themselves and have made accommodations to the culture, at age fourteen. As girls get older and struggle with those pressures, there is something that they can learn from being around younger girls who haven't come to those pressures yet. And there are also many things younger girls learn by being with older girls.

I think that having such a wide age span has its benefits and has its challenges, definitely. The biggest one is trying

to find ways to deal with issues of sexuality, and sexual identity, which come up, of course, very much with girls of thirteen and fourteen, but really aren't very much on the minds of girls who are eight and nine years old. We decided that talking about sexual identity and understanding who you are is what *New Moon* includes. We don't talk about dating. We don't talk about what you do with your sexual identity, because it isn't interesting to younger girls and it's not appropriate. That is the only thing, I think, that might benefit us to have a split in the age, if we could. But that would require two separate magazines.

R: Demographically, do you know who constitutes your readers?

NG: The average age of our readers is twelve, and so the biggest number of readers is eleven, twelve, and thirteen. Now we have many girls who keep reading the magazine until they are fifteen or sixteen. If we had our druthers, we would start a magazine for younger girls that would be for maybe five to nine year olds, and then have *New Moon* be for ten to fifteen or eleven to fifteen year olds. It would be great to have those two separate, still pretty broad age ranges, but I kind of see eleven as that crossover.

Examining Sexual Orientation

NG: Sometimes the parents' idea of what their daughter should be interested in and should be thinking about is very different from her idea, from our reader's idea. And that comes up the most when we are dealing with matters pertaining to sexual identity.

We routinely have people cancel subscriptions because we mentioned bisexuality or lesbianism. They will say, "This is really not appropriate for an eight year old or a nine year old." We aren't talking about anything other than the concerns of a girl, perhaps who wrote in a letter, "I'm bisexual, and some of my friends won't talk to me since I told them that. What should I do?" That's the kind of question that we are answering. We aren't getting into mechanics. And yet, for some parents, it's very threatening.

R: I read in one of your promotional flyers that one of the girls whom you honored in your alternative to the beauty pageant [see the excerpts following this interview] had when she was young "sent money to an organization that defended the rights of gay and lesbian people in Maine…" Could you perhaps elaborate upon the extent to which *New Moon*'s evolution has brought the magazine to the point of encompassing a wider and wider range of issues? In other words, how has *New Moon*'s feminism helped us to broaden our views of many gender-related and culturally related issues and problems?

NG: One of *New Moon*'s goals from the beginning, or at least one of my goals in the idea of *New Moon*, has been to help girls be aware of the wide range of issues that feminism is all about. Girls don't get a lot of information about these issues through our popular culture, and they don't get it through girl-specific media, either, partly because many adults don't have a clue what feminism is or what it is about. In my view, pretty much every girl is a natural feminist, actually. She expects justice, she expects to be treated fairly, she expects to have equal opportunities. And yet, in most cases no one has ever related all of those things that she feels to feminism.

For example, many girls are concerned about animal rights and justice for animals. These are basic justice issues for them. They are into justice, period. And that's what feminism is about. Feminism is about justice. And yet no one has ever opened that door for them, to see the connection there. But one of the very important things about being a teenager is to connect all of those things, connect the concern for animals with the concern for the earth, with the concern for other people, with the concern for women, with the concern for peace. These things are all connected, and yet we compartmentalize so much in our culture. I think that kids aren't really interested in compartments the way that adult culture tries to impose them.

We had a very big discussion a year-and-a-half ago about a letter that was published in which a girl said

We want our daughters to have a different world. We want you to have a world where your opportunities are not limited by your gender, where the expectations for whether or not you're going to have children are not determined by your gender, where the expectations for whether you can walk on the street at night safely are not determined by your gender. We want that world desperately, and so those messages are tapping into all those needs we and girls have. And then advertisers are using them to sell products.

that she felt homosexuality was immoral, and I was very upset that this letter was published. At that point, I was not involved in reading the text of the magazine before it was printed. We had several readers who wrote to us and asked why we published the letter. It stimulated a huge discussion. It was very interesting to work through all of this with the GEB.

In choosing that letter, the GEB was expressing one of our core beliefs, which is that every girl needs to be true to herself and what she believes and that we will respect that.

On the other hand, we would never publish a letter that said that being black was immoral or being Chinese was immoral. And so, we had a discussion about sexual orientation as being something that you are born with, that isn't a choice. It's not like whether you are nice or not, but is part of your core identity. Some of the girls didn't understand that because no one had ever talked to them about it. It actually turned out that the adult editors who were working with the board hadn't thought about it that way either, which was why they didn't put up any red flag about publishing a letter like that. That was a really valuable experience and discussion for us. And the discussion involved the parents of the girls on the editorial board, because we needed them to know that we were going to talk about this. We told them, "If you have some problem with that, now is the time for us to talk about your problem, because to us this is something we have to talk about." Girls write to us regularly about sexual identity, and just as we would not print a racist letter, so we are not going to print a heterosexist letter.

That was quite a turning point. We then published a letter, written by the GEB, in the subsequent issue, apologizing for our having published the initial letter, and explaining why we would no longer publish letters that made those kinds of assertions about people. They can think whatever they want, but our magazine's point of view is that sexual orientation is not a choice. Sexual identity is something that people can respect, and the girls had no issue with it, once it was discussed. But they didn't have the context previously to think about it this way. When they chose the letter, what they thought they were doing was saying, "Well, here's one opinion, and here's a different one." The difference is that sexual orientation is not an opinion; it's a fact.

The Media and Women's Need for Change

R: During the years that you've been running the magazine, do you think that media pressure for girls has increased, or decreased, or stayed the same?

NG: I really think it has pretty much stayed the same, although I think there are even more mixed messages than there used to be because the rhetoric of what *NM* is all about—girl power, being true to yourself—has entered the popular culture to the point that now ads for Barbie dolls don't even picture a Barbie doll. Instead, we see a wonderful photograph of a girl who is a little bit dirty and looks like a real girl, has been playing outside, and the caption says something like, "Let her be who she is." Then there's a little tiny Barbie logo down in the corner. To me, that ad for a Barbie doll is horrible. The picture is wonderful, putting a picture like that of a girl in the media is wonderful, but using that to sell a Barbie doll is horrible.

I feel similarly about magazines like *Girls' Life or Jump.* We are still trying to persuade the Girl Scouts that they should stop working with *Girls' Life Magazine.* It's a horrendous magazine which has adopted the rhetoric of *New Moon* but actually still pursues what other teen girl magazines do—teaching girls how to fit in, not how to be themselves.

Jump started in the last three or four years. Their rhetoric is about girls being themselves, but if you look at what all the articles are about, they're still about "Are You Popular?", "What Do Boys Think of You?", "How Do You Look?" That is worse than it was eight years ago when we started working on *New Moon.* At that time, *Teen Magazine* and *Seventeen* were blatantly about the importance of appearance, popularity, and what boys think of you. Now *Seventeen* has "plus size models" who are size ten to twelve. Plus size? The average American woman wears a size fourteen. Average! Yet, "plus size" in *Seventeen* magazine is size ten or twelve. So they're co-opting the rhetoric and the messages, but still using them to sell the same old messages. "You *need* this makeup; you *need* these shoes; you *need* these jeans. Be yourself. Wear the same thing as twenty million other thirteen year olds." That is what I think has gotten worse. You know, the Spice Girls are a *perfect* example. Girl power? Heaven save us!

The interesting thing about it is that the messages and the rhetoric obviously are touching a deep need that exists in girls, and, many times, in their mothers. We want our daughters to have a different world. We want you to have a world where your opportunities are not limited by your gender, where the expectations for whether or not you're going to have children are not determined by your gender, where the expectations for whether you can walk on the street at night safely are not determined by your gender. We want that world desperately, and so those messages are tapping into all those needs we and girls have. And then advertisers are using them to sell products.

R: Advertising and the media are notorious for co-opting and trivializing the rhetoric of a "stronger female," as in the Virginia Slims ads, which derogatorily proclaim, "You've come a long way, baby." This kind of manipulative co-opting of women's legitimate power and progress seems particularly harmful with respect to young girls.

NG: I feel it is particularly harmful to girls. I think it's also harmful to women, but much more harmful to girls because of the fact that girls are in a developmental transition. Psychologically and emotionally, they are moving from being concrete thinkers, whose thoughts emerge from what they're feeling in their bodies, to abstract thinkers. That transition takes quite a few years. While that transition is going on, there's a huge amount of confusion about what's what. Girls feel a natural confusion about who they are, who they want to be, what they want to do. That's a normal developmental thing. But by sending them these mixed messages, through ads and through mass media, what's happening is that the confusion is being deepened and capitalized on to an extent that undermines a girl's knowing who she is.

If the message is "be true to yourself by buying these jeans," of course we all know that's not going to work. But

a girl who's twelve or thirteen years old is desperate for anything that will help her be true to herself, because that's a huge psychological need she has at this point in her life. She's at a point where all the bearings she has in the culture are gone, and she's very vulnerable to those messages. Eventually she'll figure it out, just as I did, that the jeans don't do it. But that understanding takes time to develop, and it creates a distance from herself and who she really is that takes time to get back to. I think of it as wasted energy.

The amount of energy that women spend thinking about how we look and about what other people think of how we look is phenomenal. I hope that it is less true for younger women and girls than it used to be, but I know that for women my age the first thought, many times, is, "How do I look? Do I look fat? Do I look tired? Do I look sweaty?" Who cares? But, it's there. The amount of energy being spent on that is mind-boggling. Using our energy for that purpose diverts us away from using it for changing the culture. For the purposes of the culture, there is a reason for all of our obsession with appearance. It uses us up; it makes us feel insecure. We are always starting a step back from where we could be starting, if that weren't preoccupying us.

So, yes, I think the co-opting does have a bigger effect on girls than it does on anyone else. This is partly because girls' brains are still developing, and learning, and growing, still learning how to have perspective, how to separate who I am from the rest of the culture, from what other people think of me. There's a natural separation when they are younger, but at early adolescence, girls are in a fog about that stuff, for good reasons. But to purposely deepen the fog seems to verge on the immoral.

Strong Female Role Models

S: What kinds of role models did you have growing up? How did they influence you, and what kinds of role models for girls do you see today?

NG: I'm a bad one for this. I should come up with a list so I can answer the questions. I can tell you the people whom I was very interested in learning about when I was a girl. One was Queen Elizabeth the First. I was fascinated and read many biographies of her when I was a girl. It's very interesting history.

R: Why Queen Elizabeth?

NG: Because she was a powerful woman who went against the grain of her time. She was out there, in charge. I like being in charge. So that's probably part of it.

S: In general, would you say you had good role models or bad role models?

NG: In the popular culture? I honestly can't think of anybody whom I aspired to be like that I thought was bringing out what was the best in me. I was very influenced by traditional female expectations and stereotypes, but those were not bringing out what I really loved inside. There was another book that I loved, about women pioneers in the Far West. I don't even know if they were true stories, although I think they were. These were about women who did amazing things, like take their family over the mountain passes by themselves after their husband had died. These were phenomenal stories about being brave and strong and courageous and determined, and about going against the grain of what was expected of women. Those were the kinds of stories that inspired me as a girl.

Today my role models are still the women who get out there and take a chance, who take the risk, women who are stretching the boundaries of what people expect women to do or expect women to be. I incredibly admire what Gloria Steinem has done, both in terms of her cultural work and feminism, but also in terms of personal introspection over the past decade. I admire how she has made visible to other people, and to other women in particular, her process of aging, the way she has changed, what she thinks about, and what's important to her at different times in her life.

Bella Abzug is another woman we met in China. She was there in a wheelchair, because she couldn't walk. She was very ill at the time, but she was determined to be there; she wasn't going to let this thing happen without her. I admire

Sometimes the parents' idea of what their daughter should be interested in and should be thinking about is very different from her idea, from our reader's idea. And that comes up the most when we are dealing with matters pertaining to sexual identity.

In my view, pretty much every girl is a natural feminist, actually. She expects justice, she expects to be treated fairly, she expects to have equal opportunities.

One of our core beliefs is that every girl needs to be true to herself and what she believes and that we will respect that..

women who run for political office—incredibly brave—and their willingness to open their personal lives up to the kind of scrutiny they have to undergo, in order to do something that's pretty maligned and not well-compensated. I think Hillary Clinton is very brave. To be out in the public with both your strengths and your flaws on display is phenomenal.

S: What criteria do you use when you decide whom you will represent in *New Moon*? How do you decide who's a good role model?

NG: It's not so much choosing role models as following the ideas that the girls come up with in their brainstorming sessions, which they hold each summer, concerning upcoming themes. The managing editors, who come up with a list of possible stories, want to have people who are of different cultural backgrounds, different races, and come from different parts of the world. Those three things are very important to *New Moon* because our stories are not just about girls and women in the United States. It's about the larger world.

Sometimes the choice is made to choose someone because of a particular accomplishment, rather than because of her personality. We have a story coming up on Martha Graham, who was a huge pioneer in modern dance and also as a woman, heading up this dance company. But, she was apparently not a very nice person. She wasn't kind; she was very driven, very ambitious, very creative and talented. Indira Ghandi is another person we profiled who was not necessarily a role model in the sense of the best person in terms of her ethical and moral behavior, but she was incredibly influential and she broke many barriers, and was a great leader for her country, even with her flaws.

To me it is very important to portray the wholeness of a person. In the "Beautiful Girls" issue, one of the things that the GEB were looking for were nominations that didn't just sound like the girl was some sort of ideal in every way and had absolutely no human failings. They were looking for girls that were described as real. And when the essays were being edited, and we were going back to the original nominators to have stories added, the most common thing asked for was, "Tell us a story about something she did that was not fabulous. Something that is just a normal, everyday thing." It's really easy for girls to fall into the pursuit of perfectionism, whether it is physical perfectionism, or emotional perfectionism (that you should always be nice, kind and sweet), or sports perfectionism, or intellectual perfectionism. That steals energy away.

S: Do you ever try to portray models and entertainers in a different light, maybe a more positive one, seeing their motivation, survival, or whatever?

NG: You mean showing them as "real people"? I have a very strong personal bias against that. And while the GEB might decide to do it, I would argue against it, and then they would have to see if they wanted to do it anyway. My bias against it is that the image that already exists of celebrities—and I will just call them all celebrities, whether they are models or actors or even someone like Rosie O'Donnell—has so much power as it is that I don't think it really matters who they actually are. I have no doubt that many people who are celebrities are fine people. But, because of their role as a celebrity, it doesn't really matter who they are as a person. Take, for example, someone like Britney Spears. She may be a fabulous person, I have no idea. She may be the most generous, intelligent, politically aware person who exists. But what she sells is not that, and that is not why she is a celebrity. So I think that to try and make her seem like a normal person is not a good idea.

R: It seems from what we've talked about already that one of the problems you see concerning gender issues is that lots of strong women have allowed men to sap their strength.

NG: Well, they have allowed the culture to. As women we are encouraged to sacrifice ourselves for other people, whether it is for our spouses, or for our children. Many, many women are encouraged to sacrifice themselves for their children. That's the idea.

R: What would you say to someone who says, "Self-sacrifice can also be noble"? A number of people have self-sacrificed in an ennobling way.

NG: Absolutely. I am not opposed to self-sacrifice. What's wrong is when that is your only choice, your only option. Then it isn't really a choice. I think many women will tell you that they do choose to sacrifice for the people that they love. And I would tell you that I have done it, sacrificed for the people that I love (and sacrificed for *New Moon*, too). But I have made that choice knowing that if I decided not to sacrifice, I wouldn't have to.

Many women choose but it isn't a true choice because they don't have the ability to support themselves economically. Some of this comes down to real basic, nitty gritty things that nobody likes to talk about. It was certainly the case in my family growing up that none of the women in the family had the means to support themselves so that they could leave the situation if they decided to. You could say they were choosing to stay, because they stayed and they did have volition. They could have driven away, or they could have walked away. But they couldn't support themselves and their children, so it wasn't a real choice.

Challenging Assumptions About Beauty

S: Recently, *New Moon* came out with an opposing movement to *People* magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People" awards. What do you hope to accomplish in doing this? Do you feel you've been successful? How can these more positive kinds of awards become as natural for our society as the negative, more limited ones?

NG: What do we hope to accomplish? When we did this, we planned to do it just this one time, but we have decided now that we are going to do it again, next year. We hoped to shake up people's ideas of what beauty is, and particularly to shake up the assumption that beauty is all about appearance. What happened is that we started, about six or eight months before the issue came out, by sending out notices asking people to nominate girls, and we put notices in the magazine, and we noticed a real interesting thing. The nominations that we got from girls were totally in the spirit of what we were looking for. They were typically nominating a friend or a sister because of who she is and what she does.

When we got nominations from adults, quite often they would talk about both what the girl does, who she is, and

how she looks—what color her eyes are, or how shiny her hair is, or how she is slender. The adults were kind of hedging the bet. Just because we used the word beauty, they couldn't let go of the idea that we were looking for a typical type of appearance. The girls let go of that and they didn't have that response at all. That was the first thing that we wanted to achieve, was for people to think about what beauty is.

Everybody should feel beautiful. Why should beauty be something that is only for a few people? And yet we do think that. I have a very hard time thinking of myself as beautiful. That's too bad. It's a shame. It's another kind of draining away of energy that all of us should have. Feeling beautiful, worthwhile, loved creates energy that we can use. And so we wanted to spread that around. We also wanted people to think about what is beautiful.

We got the essays and we loved what was happening with the things that people were saying when they sent in their nominations. We started thinking about how could we take this idea, that had started with an issue of the magazine, and have it be something that other people could be part of. So we decided to have a day called "We'll Show You Beauty Day." In our office, we have three collages full of photos that people sent us from all over for "We'll Show You Beauty Day." This was totally separate from the nominations process. These are people of all ages, women and men, sending us photos of people who are beautiful.

We also have two binders full of letters that people sent. There were schools where teachers did this in their classrooms, and I think that some of them are just fabulous. My very favorite one is a girl who must be about seven or eight years old; she was drawing a little girl and a hamster. She wrote, "I am beautiful because I love my hamster." I thought, "Oh, this is just great!" "I take care of my hamster. I come home from school, and I play with my hamster. And I am beautiful!"

And that was exactly it. It captured our purpose exactly, which is that we are beautiful when we are ourselves. That's the idea of beauty that I want to see. Because that's the kind of beauty that everyone can have, that everyone does have. So we also ended up getting a lot of media response to this—which we were surprised about—talking about the need for a different definition of beauty based on who you really are, and not on what you look like (which is something that you can't really do very much about). You can do something about who you are and how you act.

R: This is fascinating. I have several questions for you. In one of the talks you gave a while ago, you mentioned that, when you were initially conceiving the idea for what is now *New Moon* magazine, you had a desire to create a feminist magazine for girls. In the late '60s and early to mid-'70s, a lot of the energy of different feminist movements understandably had to do with women's needing to separate from men. In time, feminists began to talk about not separating from men, but about being independent in a larger sense as well as being independent from men in particular, and at the same time being interdependent with them. How has *New Moon* tried to help young girls be both independent and at the same time interdependent? How has *New Moon* helped to shape a new kind of feminism, in that way? How does *New Moon* help girls to be strong, competent, self-assured, independent—so that they can be who they are, as you might say, without having to feel that their being women is necessarily in opposition to their being interested in and committed to family, and so forth?

NG: The way we do that, I think, is by acknowledging the complexity of life. But also, of our culture and of the rules and the roles and the stereotypes. I have to admit that I have some identification with this idea of not being a traitor to the cause. [Editor's note: This comment results from some chatting that we had done concerning feminists who view women who choose to stay home to raise their children as being traitors to the cause.] We have a family member whose wife was a very high-powered executive at a large company in New York, and they just had a baby. She went back to work after a couple of months,

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worked for two or three more months at a job that requires a lot of travel, and decided she just didn't want to do that anymore. I totally understand that from the point of view of herself, her baby, her life. But it also, unfortunately, will have repercussions for what people in that company think about putting women in high executive positions who are still in their childbearing years. She left a job at a company that had invested years in her, and she had invested years, as well. She was on a track to be very high up in the company.

And so the part that is upsetting to me is not her personal choice, but that there is no way for her to be on that career track *and* be a present mother at home. What that track demands is for her to make paid work the number one thing in her life.

R: To sacrifice.

NG: Exactly. To sacrifice. There is no support for her to be on that professional track and have a reasonable amount of time with the baby. That's what makes me angry. It's not about her or her being a traitor, but about the fact that our culture doesn't support the amount of time, pure time, that it takes to have children and be with children and raise children. It takes time! To do it in a way that is satisfying emotionally for the parents and for the kids, it takes time!

Challenging Assumptions and Stereotypes about Gender Roles

R: Many women have begun to find that the notion of success, as defined by male culture, so-to-speak, is an unhealthy if not downright dangerous notion. Women are not necessarily becoming independent and successful by becoming trapped in some of the more damaging male roles, such as being in the military, for example, or by becoming an executive at the sacrifice of their lives and families. How can *New Moon* help girls both be who they are and redefine notions of success, meaning, and value in their lives so that they do not have to fall into the same old traps that men have fallen into and that many feminists fall into unknowingly?

NG: Well, I view it as a linked thing. You need to know who you are, know what you want, at the same time that you acknowledge and understand the demands of the larger culture and the effects that those demands have on your life. It also has very direct effects on what you can do, what you choose to do. So, it's like you have to both know yourself and change the culture. It's not enough to just know yourself. And that's why the mission statement of *New Moon* talks about girls taking their place in the world. It's not enough to just know yourself and just be focused on who you are and introspective about yourself.

R: In practical terms, how do *New Moon* readers, girls or boys, find ways to know themselves, change the culture, and take their places in the world?

NG: When we do an article about an issue, we tell girls how they can take action. We tell them where to get information; we tell them whom they can write to; we tell them what they can do. We are constantly doing stories about girls and what they are doing, so that our readers can see what girls are doing and how they are doing it. It also creates a community, and a place for girls to feel like "I'm not the only one. I am not the only one who thinks about these things. I am not the only one who cares about these things." So they feel supported by that community. And that's very important. Girls who write in to the magazine say, "After I read *New Moon* I feel good about myself." That's the best letter we can get. When I was a girl and read magazines I felt bad about myself. I would come away with a long list of what was wrong with me after reading *Teen* or *Seventeen*, or any of those magazines. All I could think about was how I didn't measure up.

Another way we help our readers is the feeling in *New Moon* that you can change the culture. Girls can change the culture. People can change the culture. We can make things better. This is very important.

S: Do you see schools as contributing to gender stereotypes? If so, how?

NG: I do, definitely. Part of the reason that my daughters were unschooled, at various times, was because of the pressures, and gender pressures and stereotypes that we saw affecting them and that they didn't like, either.

The function that schools play is to prepare kids to fit into the culture, the way it is—not the way we want it to be, but the way it is now. The way it is now is inequitable, and so, part of the job that schools have is to teach girls and boys to take their assigned roles in the culture, the way it exists now. What that means is a secondary role for girls and a primary role for boys. It does that in very basic ways. Twenty-five years after Title IX was enacted, boys' athletics still get many more resources than do girls', even though it is totally illegal, and has been for twenty-five years. And it does it in more subtle ways that have to do with how the environment is set up and who pursues what kind of interest in school.

S: That makes me think of actors and actresses, because actors regularly receive much more money than do actresses.

NG: The wage gap is still there. Men make a dollar to women's seventy-four cents.

S: Is there a *New Moon*-type magazine for boys? What would such a magazine look and read like?

NG: There is not a *New Moon* for boys. I guess I don't know what it would look like because I am not a man and I don't have sons. I think there is clearly a need. Whether or not it could survive is a whole other question, because I think it is much harder for boys to break the mold in this culture than it is for girls. They have a lot more rules; the culture has a lot more at stake with boys, since they're supposed to grow up and run it. So it imposes much stronger pressure on boys to be the way boys are supposed to be. Girls have a lot more freedom to not be a totally stereotypical girl, but I think in part we have that freedom because the culture isn't going to lose as much. We don't have the power.

S: Many teens are involved in producing small 'zines that never get circulated. How would you suggest that people like me begin their own magazine of their dreams, creativity, and ideas?

NG: I would suggest a couple of things. Find some adult ally who can help you get the money. We started with $10,000, which is nothing in the world of magazines.

But that is an incredible amount of money to a teenager. What teen has $10,000? That was nothing to start *New Moon* with, but if we didn't have that, we couldn't have done anything, in terms of making the magazine circulate to a larger audience, which is what I assume you are talking about.

How do you get to that point? It just plain takes money, I think. That was the thing about *New Moon.* My husband and I were willing to put our money on what these girls were doing. They could have done what they were doing, and it would have been a 'zine, and people in Duluth would have gotten it, or their friends and their families' friends, and it would still have been a fabulous magazine, but it wouldn't have gotten to that next step, which is going beyond the people you know personally and personal connections that you have. I don't know a way around it. It takes money. And adult power.

A thirteen year old getting bids from printers has trouble being taken very seriously. Sad, but true. And so, another important thing, I think, is to use the strength of the kids to do the part that they know the best—contents, what to put in it, what to do with it. But use the strengths of the adult allies to bring that out into the world.

R: In the absence of a *New Moon* for boys, should parents subscribe to *New Moon* for their sons?

NG: Absolutely. What *New Moon* is doing is making girls' experience visible. Boys need to know about girls' experience. A boy wrote to us and said, "I really like the magazine. What should I do about friends who make fun of me for liking to knit?" And *New Moon* is not anti-boy. I would challenge anybody to find anything in our magazine that is anti-boy.

R: Before we conclude, would you please say a word or two about *New Moon*'s publication *Network*? Is this in any way an outgrowth of your desire to have the parents' insert in *New Moon,* about which you spoke earlier?

NG: Yes. That is exactly what it is about. *New Moon Network* is for adults who care about girls. It is a newsletter about girls' issues and is primarily for parents, but it is also for teachers, youth workers, Girl Scout leaders, clergy, coaches, camp counselors, anyone who works with girls.

The idea is that just as girls need a community to feel support for making their journey from girlhood to womanhood, the adults who are guiding them also need a place to get information on research, to hear from other people who are involved in the same journey, and who share their successes and their struggles. That's the idea. It is to encourage the adults who are raising girls to be conscious of what is going on, to pay attention. It has a smaller circulation than does *New Moon,* but it has been around for the same amount of time.

R: *New Moon* has done a lot to help us understand issues of diversity and to show us some ways in which we can celebrate our differences and sameness as human beings. It has really been a wonderful voice. In your final comments, please tell us where you think we might or ought to go from here. What vision or mission might help guide us into the kind of future that *New Moon* is helping presently to bring about?

NG: There is still so much to be done. There is such a need for people to feel supported in following their own dreams, in living their lives the way they need to live their lives, and, at the same time, to care about other people and to live our lives in a way that shows we care about other people. It seems that we have barely scratched the surface. Sometimes I am stunned that we started eight years ago. The thing that brings it home the most is looking at the girls who, when we started the editorial board, were ten, eleven, and twelve years old and are now off to college. They are getting jobs! Readers, too, are now practically grown up. It doesn't seem to me as if it has been that long. There is so much depth and so much richness that still need to be explored.

Many women choose but it isn't a true choice because they don't have the ability to support themselves economically. Some of this comes down to real basic, nitty gritty things that nobody likes to talk about.

Everybody should feel beautiful. Why should beauty be something that is only for a few people?

Girls' Declaration of Sentiments

Preamble

When, in the course of human events, girls are denied the rights and respect they are entitled to, it becomes necessary for girls everywhere to take action to improve their everyday lives.

We believe that all people—women, men, girls and boys—are created equal. We all have certain rights as people, and it is up to all of us to make sure that these rights are respected and protected. When our society doesn't recognize these rights, changes must occur. Change should not be made without good reason, but the state of our society compels us to work for change. The rights of girls have not been respected. To gain this respect, we must speak out to declare our independence and explain our reasons for doing so.

SPORTS

Facts: Girls have been denied equal access to some sports, positions, and resources. The little attention and encouragement girls receive is frustrating. Girls have been excluded from leadership roles, decreasing their capacity to participate fully as athletes.

Solutions: Girls need to speak out. Girls can create coalitions, push to be included in all sports, or create their own teams. The adults in girls' lives should encourage them with persistent support. Title IX should be more widely recognized, enforced, and expanded in all communities.

MEDIA/SELF-ESTEEM

Facts: Girls feel they must fit into an image the media has created. When they don't, they often lose their self-esteem. This loss causes many girls to be more vulnerable to peer pressure, which can lead to substance abuse, eating disorders, teenage sex, pregnancy, and other problems.

Solutions: The media should promote the beauty of all girls regardless of size, shape, or ethnicity. Girls should take the initiative to be healthier, think positively about themselves, and look for the good things in life. Girls can find support from people in similar situations, mentors, and youth organizations. Girls must take action by forming groups, writing letters, and protesting against the media's distorted images of girls.

EMPLOYMENT

Facts: Girls and women have the right to physically demanding or mentally challenging jobs if they choose. They have the right to earn 100 percent of what boys and men earn. Girls and women have the right to a combination of family and career. They have the right to be hired based on capabilities, not on appearance. Girls have the right to work comfortably without fearing sexual harassment.

Solutions: To accomplish these goals, girls must stand up for themselves. They should help each other understand the problems they face. Girls should stay positive and strong while fighting this peaceful battle for equality.

VIOLENCE

Facts: Violence and abuse occur everywhere in this nation, limiting girls' independence to fully explore the world around them. Sexual harassment and other kinds of abuse happen in schools and in some families, lowering the self-esteem of the abused or the threatened.

Solutions: Girls and their communities should make sure that social services and police are accessible and available, and that all people know how to reach them. The federal government should create a national toll-free hotline that includes teenagers who have experienced these issues.

EDUCATION

Facts: The educational system focuses on men. Not seeing women in leadership positions in history books and in schools gives girls the impression that women are not able to lead as well as men. In school, many teachers and counselors fail to encourage girls to take non-traditional classes such as high-level math and science classes, weightlifting, auto mechanics, and others. When they do take those classes, girls are often ridiculed for enrolling. Boys are allowed to be outspoken in class, while girls are expected to be quiet and self-controlled, leading girls to believe that what they think or say does not matter.

Solutions: Girls should communicate with teachers, counselors, parents, and others about their educational rights. If this approach fails, girls must write out their concerns and present them to higher authorities such as principals, school boards, superintendents, or state departments of education.

RELIGION

Facts: Many religions teach girls during childhood that only men are meant to be ministers, priests, rabbis, and leaders of congregations. Boys and men are able to participate more fully and are celebrated more often in many religions.

Solutions: Girls must challenge their religions and question the limits on their participation. Girls must examine their own beliefs to make sure that what they believe in is what they stand up for. Society should not assume that God has a specific gender.

PARENTS

Facts: Most parents are overprotective of their daughters because of problems like rape and kidnapping, but parents don't object to their sons staying out late. Parents often limit girls' freedom, subconsciously using bribery as a blindfold. They often give their daughters more clothes and money, disguising the truth that they are limiting their daughters' freedom.

Solutions: Parents should consider setting curfews, allowance, and chores by responsibility and age, instead of by gender. Girls should challenge their parents and society to make their surroundings a safe place to live.

STEREOTYPING

Facts: Society generates stereotypes about girls that categorize, suppress, pressure and make assumptions based on girls' past traditions. Examples of stereotypes that narrow how girls define themselves include the assumptions that girls should dress a certain way, look pretty, and be quiet, feminine, and pure. Girls have the right to be considered physically equal to boys. They have the right to be strong individuals and still be considered feminine.

Solutions: Girls must define their behavior and appearance according to their personal beliefs and preferences. Society must support and encourage girls' definitions of themselves.

Conclusion

In essence, girls look forward to respect, equality, good-paying jobs, and full participation in sports. Our hopes and dreams for the future are for girls and women to succeed in society and to accomplish the goals they set for themselves and for future generations. We hold the hope that girls are fully accepted by society in the near future.

On behalf of Girls International Forum, we would like to give thanks to our first foremothers: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth and Lucretia Mott. If today's society would encourage leadership in young girls and women we will have a strong tomorrow.

Signed By

Girls International Forum

Seneca Falls, New York

July 19, 1998

Ask a Girl

Ask A Girl is an advice column written for and by our readers, with occasional comments by the editors. In this column, readers help each other and take each other's problems seriously.

My school is located about a block away from a billiard hall that is open to people of all ages. It is the favorite hangout for most of the seventh- and eighth-grade students in my school. They go there at lunch, after school, and sometimes during school. This billiard hall sells cigarettes, pot, crack, and other drugs to anyone willing to pay. I am watching the lives and dreams of my peers, some of them friends, disintegrate around me. Each year, the new group of seventh graders starts going there to look "cool" like the eighth graders, and so the cycle continues. There are gangs there that carry knives and guns and have stabbed people before. Young teens just like me have died under that roof, and I am scared. These kids are not dumb; they are rebelling. Trying to help them will probably make them rebel more. I am scared for their lives, and sometimes, for my own safety. I will say it again: I AM SCARED. Please help.

Sarah, 13
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

In January, Anonymous asked for advice on how to tell her dad that she got her period. Here's what you said:

Dear Anonymous,
This is your father. He is not going to punish you for something that is perfectly normal. You might be embarrassed to talk about it at first, but remember, your mother got a period, too. Just speak up!

Constance, 11
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dear Anonymous,
My guess is that your dad has known that this will come up sometime in your life. He will probably understand if you tell him what is going on. If you are feeling nervous, try practicing in front of a mirror or to a stuffed animal. Get your speech down perfectly; then go and tell him.

Hannah, 13
St. Paul, Minnesota

Also in January, Rachel told us she wants to make more friends, especially with the girls in her neighborhood, but she doesn't know how. Because she's homeschooled, it's hard for her to meet other kids. Here's some helpful advice:

Dear Rachel,
What are you interested in? Whether it's skating or art, your town probably offers classes once or twice a week. At the lessons, you'll be doing something you enjoy, and you'll meet other girls with the same interests. As for the girls in your neighborhood, there is more you can do than say "Hi!" Go up to them and introduce yourself. Don't assume that it's their job to start a conversation. Walk up and say, "Do you think it could get any colder?" The weather is a great thing to talk about because it affects everyone. Who knows? Just that simple comment could be the start of a great friendship!

Molly, 11
Chicago, Illinois

In November, Suzanna told us she's having trouble getting along with her older sister who's mean to her. Here's what one of you said:

Dear Suzanna,
You shouldn't care about what your sister thinks. You should care what you think about yourself. When you don't ask her opinion and she says something mean, say, "I didn't ask for your opinion. That was very rude, and you should be ashamed that you're making fun of your sister. Think of me as your best friend; would you say that to her?" She'll probably think it over and respect you more. Ask her how she would feel if someone said those things to her. If you ask her opinion and she makes rude comments, say, "Thanks for your heartfelt opinion, but I like the way I dress, and there is nothing you can do about it!"

Sarah, 12
San Rafael, California

"I'm Living in Dreamtime" *by Miah Wright*

Last year on my birthday, I had to make a big decision. My mum had planned a weekend at the beach. My whole family would be there. Uncle Croc would tell us scary stories, and my grandma, Nanny Edlo, would tell us what it was like when she was a kid. I love the story about her dad chasing a goanna, a big lizard, through the house.

But my favorite story is about Boobera Lagoon. The lagoon is the resting place for Gurriya, the rainbow serpent, and people can't swim there because they might wake him. The rainbow serpent is a special being in Aboriginal (native Australian) cultures. Legend has it that he was responsible for shaping the rivers and valleys. My grandpa took us to Boobera once and told us it was like a church for our people, the Gamilaroi, one of the largest native groups in Australia.

I was looking forward to the beach trip until my best friend told me that my favorite TV star was going to be at a local teenage club on the same weekend. I'd been dreaming of the chance to meet him and secretly hoped that he would see me and sweep me off my feet!

What was I going to do? Here was my big chance. I could finally see him in the flesh. Would I go to the club or with my family?

Mum knew that I had something on my mind. I didn't want to tell her, but like most mums, she gave me advice anyway. She said, "Sleep on it." Mum says our dreams hold messages, and if I wanted to solve something, I should concentrate on the problem before I went to sleep.

That night, I dreamt of dolphins jumping, swimming, and having fun. The next morning, I swear I could smell the sea, and I knew exactly what to do. My family had gone to a lot of trouble to make sure that I would have a special birthday. I would go to the beach.

Before this, I never believed that dreams could tell you things. The Dreaming, or Alcheringa, is really the way Aboriginal people see life. We are taught how to live through songs, dances, and stories. Many of these ways of living came through dreams and were then passed on for thousands of years. Nanny Edlo says that one of the laws we learned through the Dreaming is that we are the caretakers of the land. Sometimes when I see rubbish on the street or trees being cut down, I wish other Australians could have the gift of learning from dreams, too. Mum says anyone can if they have respect for the earth and other people.

Now that I know how important dreams have been for my people, I will try to remember all my dreams. There are still a lot of lessons I can learn. And I'm hoping that one morning I will wake up and know where my favorite TV star is going to be appearing!

Girl Talk *by Ana Grossman and Carly Timm-Bijold*

Editor's Note: In our interview, we asked Nancy some questions about *New Moon*'s response to *People* magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People" issue. We include, below, several items from the *New Moon* publication that grew out of that response. The first entry, "Girl Talk," is a standard feature of the magazine; placed near the beginning of each issue, this column provides a place for members of the editorial board to discuss, in an editorial fashion, the contents (and sometimes the theme) of the current issue. The two entries, below, that follow "Girl Talk" are excerpted from the May/June 2000 *New Moon* issue, which focuses on the concept of "beauty."

Hi All You Beautiful Readers!

We've been working on this issue for a long time. It was fun to do, and we're glad to see it published.

We chose this theme because girls get so much pressure to be "beautiful" on the outside. We wanted to show that beauty isn't only skin deep—beauty is what's inside, the inner you. We also wanted to challenge People Magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People" issue.

Before we sat down to read the nominations, we talked a lot about ideas of beauty. [Editor's note: As you'll see when you read the excerpts that follow, the girls featured in this issue did not write about themselves; rather, persons nominated the girls to be included]. We watched a video that had media images of girls and women from only one week of television. It was scary and sad to see what the media is feeding us. Women and girls are portrayed as helpless damsels and men's playtoys or victims. It seems like the media doesn't care about who we really are—just about how we look.

When we read the nominations, we looked for realistic stories that maybe included a girl's imperfections. We wanted to get to know the whole girl, not just her greatest achievements. The girls in this issue show what our readers are like: girls who can care strongly about something and about themselves; girls who can overcome something, even if it's really hard.

It was very, very hard for us to choose only 25 girls from so many beautiful nominations. We looked for girls with a variety of ages and reasons why they were nominated. We wanted to get past girls being described only as "kind, wonderful, selfless." That description is as hard to live up to as having a perfect body.

We hope, as you're reading this issue, you'll feel inspired by your own inner beauty. You are a truly beautiful girl. Enjoy!

Marjorie Gómez (Age 12, California), *by Sylvia Gómez*

My daughter is truly a beautiful girl. A spokesperson for human rights and a warrior against unfairness, she speaks up in class and among her friends, even if her view is not the popular one. Recently, there was a new English as a Second Language student at her school. She made sure that this student was included in class and with her friends. She talks to new students and invites them to participate in activities with the group.

She has demonstrated against racism and for international causes. A few years ago, her class was discussing Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. She made the point that not everyone has reached the dream of equality that he spoke about, that it hadn't been accomplished yet. She thinks about these things, and even though she's embarrassed to seem different from the rest of the group, she'll bring it up anyway.

As a disabled mom and a wheelchair user, I am very fortunate to have a loving, well-spoken daughter who accepts me as I am. This is the poem Margie wrote for me for Mother's Day when she was 7.

My Mom
My Mom is nice.
My Mom is smart.
My Mom is pretty.
My Mom is disabled.
So what?!

As we say in Spanish, la belleza está en el corazón (beauty is in the heart). Some words from nuestra muchacha hermosa (our beautiful girl):

"I think the best part about being a girl is being able to grow up and have kids. We get to be mothers."

Marissa Nickelsberg (Age 13, Maine), *by Karen Anderson*

Imagine a girl who at the age of 4 would pick up every piece of trash she found because it was harmful to the ecosystem. A girl who at the age of 6 wished for peace on earth at the beginning of the new year. A girl who at the age of 8 sent money to Maine Won't Discriminate, a group organized to defend the rights of gay and lesbian people in Maine. In the letter she sent with her money, she wrote, "I don't want to live in a state that thinks some people are better than others." That letter was such an inspiration to the Maine Won't Discriminate group that the president of the group read it to 1,000 supporters of the cause and said, "Children like this are our hope for the future."

At age 10, this girl began to have her poetry published in national magazines, including a poem titled "Woman" that was published in *New Moon*. She dreams of publishing novels and other works of fiction when she gets older.

Last year, at age 12, this girl participated in Maine's first ever "Race Against Racism." She also works to increase understanding and tolerance of Jews in Maine. She became a Bat Mitzvah in December 1999, and as part of her studies, she learned her Torah portion in American Sign Language so that a deaf friend who attended the ceremony could have the experience in her own language.

This girl is not imaginary. She is my daughter, Marissa Nickelsberg, a beautiful seventh grader from Maine.

Marissa's Dream:

"I hope that in years to come people will learn to respect everyone of every race and religion and that everyone, everywhere will live happily and not be poor. I also hope that hatred will be forgotten, forever."

How Aggravating!

How Aggravating! is a column in which we voice our readers' opinions about what's unfair to girls and women. We ask that they write to us about what makes them mad, what drives them crazy, and what's unfair in their lives.

There is an overweight girl in my class. One year she sang a song for the talent show and got laughed at. This year at a school party, another girl asked her to sing the song for everyone. The second girl asked her only so she would get laughed at. Girls' lives are already hard. Why should we make life harder for other girls?

Madeline, 12
Overland Park, Kansas

At my school, we have P.E. on Fridays. Our Head Master always says, "Boys, put up your hands if you want to move the tables and chairs for games." My friend Caroline and I always put up our hands, but he ignores us and picks the biggest boys. We know that we can manage just as well, but he thinks the boys are more capable than we are. HOW AGGRAVATING!

Caitlin, 10
North Yorkshire, United Kingdom

At the church I usually attend, most of the leaders and the pastor are male. Occasionally, we have a Women's Sunday, where women lead the entire service. During a recent Women's Sunday, there were several visitors who had never been to our church before. I overheard one of them say how shocked she was that a female was preaching the sermon. Why does it matter if the pastor is a man or a woman? If you're going to church, you should be there to listen to a sermon and learn, not to criticize and critique what others are doing.

Sarah, 15
West Chester, Pennsylvania

One day, we were playing dodge ball in gym class, and the boys weren't doing very well. So both gym teachers started yelling things like: "You boys are starting to look like the girls out there" and "I know you can do better than the girls." The female gym teacher was yelling things like that, too! How aggravating!

Caitlin, 12
Lansing, Michigan

Alphabet Rainbow *by Josie Hailey*

Synaesthesia (pronounced sin us THEE shuh) means "joined sensation." It's a medical condition that affects 1 in 25,000 people, where the triggering of one sense causes another sense to respond. Some scientists think all babies are synaesthetic, but that most people's senses separate as they grow. I'm synaesthetic because I have "colored letters." When I think of a letter or a word, I see a "blurt" of color in my head.

I'm 10 years old and have known about synaesthesia since I was 7. I told my mum that some words were colors. Mum found out this was called synaesthesia, and other people have it, too. The abstract artist Wassily Kandinsky was a synaesthete. Different people experience synaesthesia in different ways. Some people taste words or hear shapes. Once we knew what my synaesthesia was, my mum and I kept a list of the colors of letters and found they never change. "E" is always blue. Most words are the color of the first letter, like the word "egg," which is blue. Occasionally, however, the word has its own color. For example, "T" is orange, but "thistle" is greeny blue.

I notice my colors most when I look at colored writing, and the colors are wrong, like if the word "thistle" is printed in pink instead of the greeny blue I see in my head. It doesn't bother me, but it does stand out. Once, I called my friend "Orange" instead of her name, Katy, which is an orange word. Sometimes it helps to jog my memory if I've forgotten someone's name, but not their color.

I like some words' colors more than others. "P" is purple, and my favorite words are "P" words, like "pig" and "perfect." "Deep" is a lovely, dark word with a blue sheen. When I write, I like to use my favorite color words. To me, some sentences are a better combination of colors than others. "The dog walked down the road" is a horrible, dull combination of blue, black, green, and brown. "The princess rode her horse," on the other hand, is a beautiful combination of pink, purple, red, orange, and yellow. If I write a good-colored sentence, the story sounds better to me.

One Monday, my mum introduced me to a woman named Ros, who also has synaesthesia. We told each other our colors for the word Monday. She was the first synaesthete I had met. It was fun, and we understood each other. I would love to know other kids who have synaesthesia. So far, I only know one.

My mum thinks it's great to be synaesthetic, and she is jealous of me. When I tell most people about it, however, they look blankly at me, think that I'm weird, or believe I'm making it up. But some people do think I'm lucky. It doesn't affect my schoolwork or my ability to communicate. A woman artist is going to help me paint my synaesthetic colors. I'm pleased someone would enjoy seeing the colors of my words. Most of the synaesthetes I've met tend to be creative people, like artists or musicians, and they use their synaesthesia in their work. Synaesthesia is not a disability; it is more of a gift because I get to experience the world in a different way.

A—black, red
B—brown
C—yellow
D—dark brown
E—blue
F—green
G—orange
H—black
I—white
J—pink
K—orange
L—green
M—pink
N—green
O—white
P—purple
Q—purple, dark red
R—red
S—yellow
T—orange
U—gray
V—gray
W—dark gray
X—black
Y—yellow
Z—black

Freedom to Learn *by Roversi-Deal*

What does the word "education" mean to you? For most people, the word "education" brings to mind a classroom full of kids sitting at their desks working on math problems while the teacher writes on the chalkboard. At one time, that was my experience of education. But these days, things are different. What most people don't realize is there is a way to learn that doesn't include school.

Learning outside of school, called homeschooling, means learning at home. Homeschoolers learn either with or without a study program. An unschooler is a homeschooler who does not follow any type of program but pursues learning based on her interests. For example, if an unschooler wants to know how a book is printed, she might volunteer at a printing or publishing company.

Since starting homeschooling, my world has become one of endless possibility. In addition to my core subjects of Math, History, English, and Science (which I follow from a program at home), I take horseback riding lessons, guitar lessons, Aikido (a martial art), and acting classes. I also work twice a week at the horse ranch where I ride, and I volunteer at a local radio station. I think I get a better education by homeschooling. I used to go to school, but now that I'm home, I've found that I can learn twice as much in half the amount of time!

Thirteen-year-old Chenoa Lizarraga, from Hawaii, agrees. "I love to homeschool because you learn more [than in school] and you get to pick the projects you do."

"You can learn the things you want, when you want," says 15-year-old Mary Roversi from California, who's been homeschooled on and off since kindergarten. Now, she is doing unschooling. There is no typical day for Mary. "Every day is different," she explains. "I don't think about the future that much. I take every day as it comes."

Elly Roversi, a 16-year-old from California, has been homeschooled nearly her whole life. "People think just because I'm not in school I must be very behind on my education," she says. "I actually do unschooling, which means I don't have a study program. That scares a lot of people, but it doesn't bother me." She says she loves homeschooling because it "lets you be independent" and learn from life.

At 15, Caitlin Stern, from Alaska, is devoted to educating herself by unschooling. She works for a biologist who is studying the bald eagle population in Chilkat Valley. One day, Caitlin got to canoe 13 miles down the river as part of her work with the bald eagles. She commented that every morning she would pass the local high school and think about the people inside preparing for the real world while she was out in it.

"There is a world out here that school seems to separate you from," says Caitlin. "You wait at least 13 years before they allow you out into it. School may be a place where some people enjoy learning. But you don't have to go to school to learn."

Caitlin will be starting college in the fall of 2001. "Many people have the idea that you can't get into college without graduating from high school," Caitlin said. "In fact, most colleges don't require a high school diploma, GED [Graduate Equivalency Degree], or any other kind of certification. Most of the colleges I have visited have been extremely receptive to the concept of learning outside of a traditional schooling environment." She says that several colleges suggested she keep track of the literature she reads and the time she spends doing educational activities. "Now I keep a record book, which I write in every day," she explains.

Some people think that homeschoolers must be lonely without the everyday contact with classmates. In some ways, it's true. One of Chenoa's closest friends goes to school, so she doesn't get to see her as much as she would like to.

Mary said that she sometimes gets lonely, too, because she likes to be around people. But, she continues, school "just wasn't something I wanted to be doing."

Elly agrees. "I guess you meet a lot of people [at school], but—contradicting a popular myth—I've found my best friends outside of school."

Homeschooling may not be for everyone, but it is one way to get an education. The important thing is that we all find a way to enjoy our education—only then are we truly free to learn.

Think homeschooling might be for you? Visit the National Home Education Network website at www.nhen.org for answers to any question or call (413) 581-1463.

Remembering Christmas Trees

By Charlie Miles

Charlie Miles is a homeschooling mom and the editorial assistant for *Paths of Learning*.

It came on me all at once. Cobby and I were at Home Depot, picking up some parts to repair a broken sprinkler. It was late afternoon, but already dark, and I wanted to get home to start dinner and wind down the day. During fall and winter, when the days are short and the nights are long, I enjoy spending evenings inside, sewing while the children play or someone reads aloud. I like the quiet, and the solitude, and the absence of activity that the long days of summer seem to demand. When we drove into the parking lot, Cobby had seen the sign, "Christmas Trees," and he had reminded me several times as we shopped that he wanted to see the trees before we left. Since I wanted to go home, I had hoped that he would forget, or understand that I was too tired to look at trees now, but no. He insisted. I wouldn't have to buy; we would just look.

As we entered the Christmas tree lot, my mind flooded me with memories of Christmas trees from my past. One year, my three children and I had arrived at the lot just as the truck drove in, and we waited in a line for the trees to be unloaded. *Our* tree was still wet when we picked it out, and we happily congratulated ourselves on a tree that would last through the holidays without drying out. It was a beautiful tree, and we loved it fiercely. That year was also the first year that my daughter Cyleste had lived away from home, although she was still nearby enough that her comings and goings during the winter holidays made it seem as though she hadn't moved out at all.

The year before that, I had driven home with the tree on the roof of my car and pulled into the garage, forgetting that the tree was there. "Typical distracted mom," my children laughed, as I tried to back out without ruining the tree, the garage door, or the car. I put up the decorations by myself that year, with some help from Sami and Cobby; Cyleste was just too busy with school to help out.

The year we moved to Corona [CA] was the last year of my mom's life. After years of apartment living, we urgently felt the need to spend the holidays in our own home, for the first time, rather than driving an hour and a half to my brother's home. Although it caused something of a family rift, Mama agreed to spend Christmas with us. After Hanukkah but before Christmas, we drove to a tree farm where we could pretend that we were in a forest, choosing and cutting our own tree. When we brought it home, the tree that had appeared petite when out of doors seemed huge in our living room. I felt sad about killing a living thing, a tree that had once housed animals perhaps, and which still carried with it the leaves of weeds and other trees, the dust and dirt of a wild thing. That same year a friend gave me the book, *Love You Forever*. As I stood in the lot at Home Depot, I remembered reading the book when we opened our gifts, and weeping as I read the lines, "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always, As long as I'm living my Mommy you'll be." A few months later, as my mom was wheeled into the operating room for her last surgery, I looked straight into her eyes and repeated those words.

"Samantha" was the living tree that Cyleste and I had bought when we were a single family, years before Richard, Sami or Cobby entered our lives. Samantha was purchased from a nursery, and in the spirit of sticking up for that which is outcast, Cyleste had chosen it among all the living trees because it was the ugliest and the least likely to be purchased by someone else. It was crooked and misshapen, not at all like a Christmas tree, but she loved it. It was large for our tiny apartment, and when the holiday was over, we planted it in a whiskey barrel and kept it on our balcony. When we moved to an apartment with a yard, the year Sami was born, we replanted it, and it grew to be a beautiful, large tree, sending its roots through the bottom of the barrel deep into the ground. During those days, as I learned to live with my Jewish husband, Richard, I came to understand that many people find Christmas to be a time of alienation and suffering, a time that marks them as outside of the culture. Nevertheless, even after we moved, we would sometimes drive by just to see how Samantha was getting on.

And then, from someplace deep in my memory, came an image from my childhood. My sister and I had gone to a Christmas tree lot together. As we walked among the trees, with their lovely deep fragrance, she nursed her second child, my niece Kimmy. It was cool and evening, much like this evening when Cobby and I found ourselves in a tree lot, and the baby was wrapped and covered against her, safe and warm, protected and pure. To my child's mind all was magic: she was Madonna and child, the world was whole and holy, beautiful, serene and all of one piece. Absolutely anything was possible. I was nine years old.

Winter nights are a perfect time for reflection. What does it mean to experience so many years of life, all at one moment? And what was it about this particular evening with Cobby that brought it all back?

By spending so many hours of our lives with our children, by watching their growth and reveling in their joys, perhaps we find some healing, some meaning for our own lives. Our children will always bring us back to the present, will always remind us that life is here, in this very moment. We look into their eyes and see in their smiles all that makes life complete.

When we live with children, we live the lessons of impermanence, day by day. We watch their development, noticing how each phase of their lives makes way for new lessons, and gives way to new awakenings. One moment they are learning how to walk, the next they begin to read, and soon after they apply for college. We cannot stop them, freeze time, and keep them infants; nor do we want to.

Instead, we challenge ourselves to be there, to really see them, and in doing so, to fully open our eyes to life all around us. When we fail to do so, to be entirely mindful of the present moment, we find ourselves frustrated and angry. Things aren't going the way we want, we don't have enough time, enough love to go around. Perhaps we blame others for the currents of regret we experience within ourselves. One day, we are surprised to find that our children have grown up.

Luckily for me, as I stood in the Christmas tree lot at Home Depot, Cobby clasped my hand and pulled me over to where the trees lay stacked, side by side, waiting to be adopted. "We don't have to buy one now," he said. "We'll wait for Cyleste to come home from Ithaca. Let's just look, and see what kind we want. Don't they smell great?" And suddenly, I was there with him, just a mom and a small boy, on a cool December evening in California, amongst piles of fragrant pines, in a world in which anything was possible, absolutely anything.

A Victory for Democracy, A Victory for Children

An Update on Summerhill's Legal Victory by Way of an Interview with Zoe Readhead

by Jerry Mintz

Editor's Note: In our Winter 2000 issue of *Paths,* we published an update article on Summerhill, entitled "Summerhill in Crisis," written by Jerry Mintz, our Editorial Advisor, who is a stalwart and tireless defender of democracy in education and a leader in the field of alternative education for the past thirty years. In his piece, Jerry brought us up to speed with the then-current crisis facing Summerhill, which had been threatened with closure by what Jerry aptly termed England's "education establishment" unless the school complied with various demands, some of which clearly threatened the sum and substance—indeed, the very nature—of Summerhill's underlying philosophy of freedom and democracy in children's education. The possible, deleterious implications for other democratically oriented schools, which look to Summerhill as their model, were not lost on anyone following this case. As Zoe Readhead herself said, "I feel that what happens here today could happen somewhere else tomorrow. It's very worrying, the trend toward this very high-powered, academic education with absolutely no room for humanity" ("Summerhill in Crisis" 42).

To the great relief and joy of so many of us following this case, in March 2000 Summerhill won a legal victory. Shortly afterward, Jerry interviewed Zoe on his Talk America Network radio show. He published an edited version of this interview in the Spring 2000 issue of *The Education Revolution* (issue #29, pp. 3–7). With his permission, we offer you, below, a very slightly revised version of the originally published interview. We hope that you find this interview uplifting; although the fight for children's rights in education goes on, perhaps Summerhill's victory will give us all a sense of hope that our children's educational rights and freedoms have found some important precedent-setting legal protection.

Zoe Readhead

Author's Note: On March 20, 2000, Summerhill School won an important court victory, giving them the right to continue operating the school with A.S. Neill's philosophy of freedom in education. The following is excerpted from an interview with Zoe Readhead, Neill's daughter and current Summerhill Head, which I did on my Talk America Network radio show. The final scene with the school in a London courtroom seems worthy of a feature film, although it might seem somewhat unbelievable. It is nevertheless true.

Jerry: This week an event took place that sent shock waves around the world. All of you concerned about government interference with individuals should know that Summerhill has been under attack for a year because it would not conform to the rigid English national curriculum. They have a national curriculum that everyone in all the schools is supposed to follow there. Summerhill brought the government to court to assert their right to run the school according to the philosophy of their founder, A.S. Neill, who advocated a child-centered approach to children's education. In the final week there was a Tribunal and they actually brought the whole school into court. [Editor's Note: The Tribunal is the same as the court that heard the case.]

Zoe: For the last nine years, the inspectors from the government department have visited Summerhill every year. Ordinary schools get an inspection every four to five years. We felt we were under attack. In March of 1999 we had eight inspectors come and visit us for three days, bearing in mind there were only about 57 children at the time. When the report was finally written it was a

Jerry Mintz with Summerhill T shirt, speaking at IDEC in Japan.

PHOTO BY TOMO USUSA

Jerry Mintz worked as a public school teacher and a public and independent alternative school principal for seventeen years. In 1989 he founded the Alternative Education Resource Organization, which he continues to direct, and is the editor of its networking magazine, *The Education Revolution* (formerly *AERO-GRAMME*).

sensational piece of writing, fit for the tabloid newspapers and not fit to be a serious government report. It even appeared to be designed for the tabloids. It was a very nasty piece of writing indeed. It used words like "foul mouth" and "the children were in pursuit of idleness." It accused the school of health and safety problems and that the children were not learning sufficiently. And then the Secretary of State for Education issued a notice of complaint to the school, which means that the school was required to follow the changes that were demanded.

Jerry: Why do you think that they would want to attack Summerhill in this way? The government has established a national curriculum in which every student in England is supposed to participate, is that right?

Zoe: The national curriculum is not compulsory for independent schools, although they use the national curriculum as their benchmark; so, in fact, we are obliged to follow the national curriculum though legally we don't have to.

Jerry: Summerhill took an approach that was entirely different from what the government does with the national curriculum. At Summerhill, students are not required to go to classes, decisions are made democratically, and that's been going on ever since the school started. In a sense, if Summerhill was successful, it would almost show the government that what they were doing was not necessary.

Zoe: One wonders about that. It's very difficult to know where all this came from. Whether it was just blundering bureaucracy or whether it was something more sinister, we'll never know. Through all our inspections, it was very clear that these people not only misunderstood Summerhill, but many of them were strongly prejudiced against it when they came. So during the last few years, we have seen inspectors showing real anger towards us while they were in the process of inspecting us, which is a totally unprofessional thing to do. The report itself also made many accusations against the school, which were totally unfounded. So the evidence that they had was very small. The notice of complaint had six items on it, and we had to comply within a given time or they would have been able to strike the school off the register so that it could no longer function as a school.

They tell you what the complaint is and they tell you what the recommendation is. There were three that we felt we could comply with. One was to do with some floor covering that needed re-doing. One was to do with making sure there were more health and safety checks on the kids' rooms, so the meeting elected a committee and they go every couple of weeks and they check out all the rooms. [Editor's Note: At Summerhill, the concept of a "meeting" refers not simply to a gathering or get-together. Rather, a meeting is a democratic decision-making process in which each student and staff member has an equal vote. The decisions of this meeting run the school.] A local electrician has trained them.

The other complaint concerned some problems we had in Class 2, which is what we call Key Stage 3: ten to twelve year olds. It's an age where anybody who is involved in democratic schools will know they tend not to want to go to class very much anyway; they want to be out doing exciting things. So we tried to see if we could improve the teaching facility and the general make-up of Class 2. We put together a really good package and we are very happy with the way things are going.

We contested one of the complaints, which was about good old toilets. Now, I know that's something of a joke and the rest of the world thinks that the Brits have got an obsession with toilets, and I think that they probably have. At Summerhill we live like a family; it's a boarding school, so the community all lives in the school. We don't have separate toilets for boys, girls, or adults. The government said we had to have separate toilets for boys, girls, and adults. They've been telling us this since 1992, and we haven't done it. Every year we've written back and told them we're not prepared to do that and gave them our reasons. We have children's welfare and safety in hand through our democratic process and through the fact that the children know that they have a voice and that they can be heard. That was one of the big, contentious things and it

sounds silly. People have said to me, "It's really petty. Why not just put notices on the doors?" But it actually is a really important issue here. It's about our right to govern ourselves within our community, so we stuck out for that one.

The other complaint was about lessons. It didn't actually say in the complaint that we had to have compulsory lessons. What it actually said was that we have to ensure that the children are engaged in learning, either in timetabled lessons or in prescribed self-supported study programs. That word "ensure" is a very short word, but it actually had a lot of punch for us. When we got into court, our lawyer spent almost a whole day talking to the witness for the other side and finding out exactly what they meant by this word, ensure. So that was the other complaint that we contested.

The last complaint was about assessment. In Summerhill, we only assess kids when they are in class, so if you go to class, we assume that you're ready to be assessed. Obviously, when someone is teaching you, they need to be assessing you as they go along in order to teach you further. But if you don't go to class, we don't assess you. When you're not in class, you're your own person and that's fine and they don't like that. They demanded that we have better assessments and more full assessments.

Jerry: Of course, we assume that you don't give grades.

Zoe: No, in England you don't give grades anyway; you just do your final GCSE—the General Certificate of Secondary Education—exams. Most children take those at the age of fifteen, turning sixteen. They usually sit all of them at once, between four and nine, and they cover most subjects. Then you have those certificates when you leave. But at Summerhill we take them staggered over several years. We take them at very different times, whenever the kid wants to, and some kids may never want to take any. It's completely optional.

Jerry: If they want to go on to college, they pretty much have to pass these, is that right?

Zoe: Yes they do, but this idea that you have to have one hundred of them is a bit of a fallacy. What our kids often find is that if they want to go to college, they find out how many they will need, and they work hard on the ones that they need. They're evidence of your knowledge of a subject, but they are not evidence of your knowledge as a person.

Jerry: And Summerhill actually has an above-average rate of students passing these tests and going on to college…

Zoe: Well, our GCSE pass rate is higher than the national average, but I don't know how the national average compares with the averages at other independent schools. We never professed to be a school that you're going to send your kid to if you want them to be the most academic achieving. If they want to do that, that's great, and we have many students who pass lots of GCSEs and very happily go on to University and get good degrees. But we also have kids who don't want to do that, and that's fine with us, too.

Jerry: We'll set the scene: the school has protested against two of the complaints and said they were not willing to comply with them, and said that if they run out of appeals, they—that is, the school itself—would close the school rather than change Neill's ideas. They have taken the government to court. Now the week comes, and the Tribunal starts. What was that like?

Zoe: Well, obviously the school was very wound up and tense about the whole thing. We had a fantastic legal team. This is a process that all schools have a right to if they're not happy with the notice of complaint which they receive, but they don't get any funding to help fight it. So Summerhill had to raise money for this. We were represented in court by Jeffrey Robertson, QC, who is one of the world's most famous human rights lawyers. He's an Australian, and he's fought many cases against governments on human rights issues. We were very happy to have him on board. On Monday all the kids, the staff, the cook, and the cleaners came up to the courtroom. The trial was held in the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand in London, a very big, imposing building full of courtrooms. When we all got to the courtroom, there wasn't enough room, so the judge allowed the children to come and sit on the floor. The gallery was full and then there were kids all sitting down the aisles on the floor watching the case. The whole thing looked a bit like a Summerhill meeting, which was great.

Jerry: How old were those kids?

Zoe: Our very smallest ones didn't come, but I think the youngest one was probably ten.

Jerry: So these kids from ten years old on came to the court. What was their behavior in the courtroom?

Zoe: Well, just fantastic. One of the boys was crying and some people were a bit upset, but basically they were all quiet and they listened and were attentive. They were really interested.

Jerry: What seemed to be the reaction of the court to having these kids in there?

Zoe: There was a very warm feeling from the bench; I think they liked it. I don't know whether the opposition liked it very much, but certainly our team really liked it. It was certainly an understanding. The judges had been to visit the school, as had the opposition. I think the judges had obviously felt how important the meeting was to the school; they attended one of our meetings. Obviously it was something they felt was important—the kids should be allowed to be there.

Jerry: So the Tribunal started that Monday. And how did that day go?

Zoe: The first witness on the stand was Michael Fitz, who is the Chief Registrar of Independent Schools. Jeffery Robertson was cross-examining him and it was a very interesting process. Basically, the points that he was making were, first of all, what this word ensure means, because in an earlier draft, which Ofsted [the Office of Standards of Education] had sent to the Secretary of State of the Department for Education, Mr. Blunkett recommended that we should have compulsory lessons. He had decided that he'd only ask us to ensure involvement in learning. So there was some difference of opinion between the Department for Education and Ofsted. So our QC spent a lot of time establishing with Michael Fitz exactly what the word ensure means. Of course, it became very clear that you cannot

Left: Summerhill students from different cultures play together. Right: Group photo at Summerhill IDEC, 1999

ensure something without making it compulsory.

Jerry: So that point was made. On the second day, what happened?

Zoe: It became very clear that, although the government said they were not demanding that we change our philosophy, they very clearly were. On the second day, Mr. Fitz was on the stand again for the whole day. Things were coming to light, for instance, the fact that Summerhill had been on a list called TBW: To Be Watched. There are 250 schools in the country on this TBW list, but none of the schools know they're on it. We knew we were being inspected every year, but we didn't know that we were on a TBW list. That was something else that our QC was making real headway with in showing that the governments at the time had put Summerhill on this hit list and were intent on inspecting it every year. The judge seemed very unhappy about the idea that the school should be on this list without being aware that they're on it.

Jerry: Let's just talk about the dramatic events that concluded the proceedings. After two days of testimony, in which the government's case was beginning to look pretty bad, what did they do?

Zoe: Their case was clearly crumbling, and one's impression was that they didn't really want to get more of the witnesses on the stand. We hadn't even begun to give our evidence yet. They had read all our information; our evidence was very strong indeed. So after the first two days, they indicated to our counsel that they wanted to get into discussions for settlement. The point is with an Independent Schools Tribunal the court doesn't have very much power. It has the power to close the school immediately, and it has the power to annul the notice of complaint, but that's the only power it has. It can't give you anything; it can't make any kind of guidelines or anything else.

In the settlement that we finally agreed to, we have many more safety areas in place, which will be backed up by our lawyers in the future as well. Part of that clause has been to recognize that Summerhill has a different philosophy and that it can follow its philosophy. It says here, in the letter of withdrawal of complaints, "The government concedes that Neill's philosophy must henceforth govern Ofsted's approach to the school. It will not subject the school to another full inspection for at least four years." And most dramatically for children's rights, "It accepts [that] the pupil's voice should be fully represented in any evaluation of the quality of education at Summerhill." It also agrees that "learning is not confined to lessons and acknowledges the right of children not to attend them." Those things are written into the agreement that we have. Obviously the Tribunal would not have been able to give us those things.

Jerry: They came up with this proposal, and Summerhill insisted that the government's proposal to withdraw its complaints could only be accepted by a democratic school meeting. And where did that meeting take place?

Zoe: Our legal people asked the judges if we could use the courtroom to have one of our general school meetings. As they had visited us and knew the importance of the meetings, they agreed to do that. The court was cleared, the judges went out—I mean, we're talking about a very formal courtroom here in the Royal Courts of Justice in London! The chair of the meeting went and sat in the judge's chair, and her vice chair and secretary sat on either side of her.

Jerry: And the chair is how old?

Zoe: She's just fifteen…She's an experienced chair at school.

We read the press statement and then we voted on whether the people who had been put outside—not the judges, obviously—would be allowed in. One of them was actually one of the school inspectors. It was still carried that she should come in as well. There was one inspector and two of their solicitors who actually came into the courtroom. The school voted that they could come in and listen to the rest of the meeting. Then Jeffrey Robertson, our QC, read out the terms of the agreement. Lots of the Summerhill kids and staff asked him questions about it, and when he'd answered them sufficiently, one of the pupils proposed that we would accept these terms. And it was carried unanimously.

At one point the court usher had to come in and ask us if we could be quiet because when we read out the agreement the children and everybody all

cheered and shouted. She came and said, "Look, I'm really sorry, but there's a family court case going on next door." So everybody said they were sorry and were quiet. Then the judges came back in again and the court was back in session. The treasury solicitor who was our opponent read out the terms of the agreement and the judges acknowledged that this was good for them and then the whole courtroom came to a close.

Jerry: I gather that the education department/opposition agreed to pay some of your expenses, an action that they would not have been required to do.

Zoe: Yes, the problem with these Independent Tribunals is that you don't get any costs paid, but on the other hand, you're never liable for the opponent's costs, either. So really what they made was a donation to the school because what they gave us was very little; it was just a small gift rather than any kind of compensation for the amount that we spent. I think it was just another sign that they were wrong and that we won the case.

Jerry: Well, this victory has been cheered all over the world. Summerhill has had a list serve of former students and so on; it's been fascinating to watch. Everyone was so excited—people as far away as New Zealand and Australia were watching this case. What do you think is the significance of this decision for education in England and around the world? I ask this question because I think that this decision is very important and has a connection with the standards movement that is happening here in the United States. What do you think is the significance of this decision for other schools?

Zoe: Well, I think that when a legal case like this comes about, it's written in cement in a way. It's written legally, it's important, and it is not something that people can just pretend didn't happen. It was a benchmark decision. I think that on many planes, the fact that a school has been able to challenge Ofsted and the Department for Education and has won is really important. That applies to countries all over the world with their education authorities. Also, for children's rights, it's of huge importance because now the children have actually gotten it written into this agreement that the children shall be listened to. The inspectors never sat down and had discussions with the kids about how the kids felt about their school. So the kids felt very disempowered by it all.

Jerry: One of the things that was established from this is that learning takes place all the time and not necessarily just in classes.

Zoe: That's right. One of the things that we're really anxious to show here is that any future government evaluators/inspectors have to look at the whole Summerhill picture. The things you learn, as well, are not necessarily the things they would expect to be the most important. What we have written into this agreement is that, when we have inspections, we can have our own independent report written as well. And they have to take account of that.

Jerry: When I went to the New York State Alternative Education Association, a lot of the schools were complaining that the Commissioner of Education for NYS had turned down their request for a continuing waiver from the NYS Regents tests. I announced the Summerhill victory and said, "You know, what you really have to do is stand up to these bullies; then, hopefully you'll be able to get the same kinds of results."

Zoe: I think the sad thing about it from the point of view of bureaucracy and government is that Summerhill is very lucky because Summerhill's very famous, whereas another small school just has to shut up and do as it's told because it hasn't got those resources and it hasn't got the years and fame that Summerhill has. It's a tragedy.

Jerry: One of the things that we're talking about on the list serve of alternative educators around the world is establishing an international swat team and a fund to help schools that may be in a similar situation.

Zoe: Good idea.

Epilogue:

Next year will be the 80th anniversary of the founding of Summerhill School by A.S. Neill. It can be argued that the publication of the book ***Summerhill***, in 1961, led to the free school movement, which subsequently led to public alternative schools, homeschooling, and charter schools. There have been other sources of inspiration for a learner-centered approach, but Summerhill is certainly one of the most powerful. Against this movement for a learner-centered education has been the "standardization" movement, coming from the educational bureaucracy. Thus, when the English government inspectors attacked the school and threatened it with closure, their action potentially threatened the viability of all non-standardized education. Summerhill School pulled out all the stops and brought the government to court. When it won the case in dramatic fashion, it struck a significant blow for all of us who are working toward the creation of learning environments that truly meet students' needs.

A BBC news website reported that "[T]the school had a right to its own philosophy and that any inspection should take into account its aims as an international 'free' school." A 15-year-old Summerhill student, Carmen Cordwell, chair of the meeting of pupils, said: "After 79 years, this is the first official recognition that A. S. Neill's philosophy of education provides an acceptable alternative to compulsory lessons and the tyranny of compulsory exams."

On an earlier trip to Summerhill, I interviewed Carmen and Nathan, another student, who talked about their role in the fight. On another visit this May, the elation and joy at the school were palpable. The above interview that I did with Zoe summarizes the history of the fight. If the school had lost its case, the loss could have created a reverse effect of the one that brought forth the free school movement, and validated the "standardization" approach. For those of us promoting educational alternatives, we cannot underestimate the significance of the fact that Summerhill won.

A Resource List *Compiled by Robin Martin*

Here are some ideas about other resources to explore more about the Summerhill case or about legal and political issues in general within education and educational alternatives.

Perspectives on the Summerhill Court Case

Summerhill's website—as of June 2000, contained daily diaries on their views of the proceedings, as well as information on the "Save Summerhill campaign." http://www.s-hill.demon.co.uk/index.htm

Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)—the original report that critiques Summerhill with details of the inspectors' main findings from March 1-5, 1999. http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspect/docs/summerhill.htm

Centre for Self-Managed Learning: "Report of An Inquiry into Summerhill School" (January 2000)—an independent team conducted another detailed inspection of Summerhill, following the Ofsted Report, with much different findings. http://www.selfmanagedlearning.org/Summerhill/RepMain.htm

Action for Solidarity: "Summerhill: The inspectors call"—highlights ideological clashes between Summerhill and Ofsted. Article portrays the value of Summerhill as an educational experiment and explains why it's important "not to regard Summerhill's education as ideal." http://www.actionforsolidarity.org.uk/welfare/s-hill7.htm

Legal Help for Schools and Children Around the World

One critical issue that both Jerry Mintz and Zoe Readhead raise in this interview concerns the ways in which other alternative schools might respond to similar threats to their existence. In addition to legal support resources, here are other organizations and associations of students and educators standing up for themselves around the world:

OBESSU: Organizing Bureau of European School Student Unions—"One of the primary aims of OBESSU is to support the development of the educational system in the different countries of Europe through a deeper involvement of students [sic] participation in the decision making process" (from the Human Rights Education section of the OBESSU website). For more information about this organization's projects and school networks (plus great links to other youth, parenting, and other education associations in Europe), visit the website at http://www.obessu.org/index2.htm.

National Children's and Youth Law Centre University of New South Wales Sydney NSW 2052 Australia. Phone: (02) 398 7488. Fax: (02) 398 7416. Information website: http://yarn.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/yarn/ncylc.html E-mail: ncylc@unsw.edu.au

Education Ombudsman ("Elevombudet")—the Norwegian Upper Secondary School Students (Elevorganisasjonen i Norge) created a position in Norland County that helps student councils by offering them assistance in their work and giving them courses to help build them up, as well as by helping students with educational rights problems. http://www.melbu.vgs.no/ombud (in Norwegian), or e-mail: elevombudet@unginfo.no.

American Civil Liberties Union on Student Rights—includes a student organizing manual, with good links to news stories of students battling for free expression around the country. http://www.aclu.org/issues/student/hmes.html

Benchmark Cases in Education

Law and the Shaping of Public Education: 1785-1954 by David Tyack, Thomas James, and Aaron Benavot (1987)—this book on legal issues in the United States takes a historic perspective as it explores: (1) how leaders use constitutional and statutory laws to build common schools and then to standardize them as state systems, and (2) the tension between majority rule and minority rights in education law. (Published by the University of Wisconsin Press.)

No Master High or Low: Libertarian Education and Schooling in Britain: 1890-1990 by John Shotton—this book provides a historic view of libertarian schools in Britain, portraying Summerhill and many other schools in a much broader context of social and political change. (Published by and available from Lib Ed, http://www.libed.demon.co.uk/)

U.S. Supreme Court Cases Involving Student Rights—five brief summaries of important cases, 1954 to 1995, with a short yet useful bibliography of books on the topic. http://members.tripod.com/~skyhawk13/cases.html

Other Sources of Support

In addition, other organizations and conferences through which schools can find general networking support for sustaining themselves include:

Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO)—helps people who want to change education into a more empowering and holistic form. It helps individuals and groups of people who want to start new community schools, public and private, or change existing schools. AERO publishes a networking magazine called *The Education Revolution,* as well as hosting a growing list serve called AEROlist, and offering other consulting services. Call 1-800-769-4171, or visit http://www.edrev.org for more information.

The International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC)—established in 1993 to provide a forum, meeting place, and support for democratic schools around the world. For more information, join the list serve about IDEC described at http://www.edrev.org/listserves.htm, or call 1-800-769-4171.

National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools (NCACS)—an international coalition of schools, communities, home schools, and individuals committed to creating an egalitarian society. NCACS hosts an annual conference for those interested in sharing ways to empower their own schools or learning communities with new ideas for learner-centered education and creating a more egalitarian society. Call 1-888-771-9171, or visit http://www.ncacs.org.

For More Information…

For more details on the above resources, more resources about other free schools around the world, or additional ideas for supporting the political and legal interests of small alternative schools, struggling or otherwise, we invite you to visit our Online Action Guides at http://www.great-ideas.org/guides.htm, where you can easily link to the referenced books and websites as well. Or, for a printed version of this Online Action Guide about Summerhill and legal issues for alternative schools, call 1-800-639-4122.

A Request: For anyone reading this list who knows about other legal and support resources for helping alternative schools and students in consolidating their political and legal efforts, please write to robin@pathsoflearning.net. We would like to continue compiling this list of resources online.

A Connective Pedagogy

by Dr. Mary Goral

With the recent incidences of school violence fresh in our minds, coupled with our increasingly hurried lifestyle, changes in family structure, and intense economic pressures, parents and educators are grappling with ways to stay connected to our children. Staying connected is harder than it once was, due in part to changes in family structures that are exacerbated by increasing economic pressures. According to Sanacore (1999), compounding these difficulties is the socially toxic environment in which we are raising our children. Sanacore goes on to define the elements of a socially toxic environment, which include poverty, violence, alienation, depression, and paranoia, all of which undermine and place stress on communities and families.

Elkind (1988), in his book *The Hurried Child,* believes that changes in society, such as both parents working, a more hurried lifestyle, and an increased use of technology, have placed extreme stress on children and their families. Children are expected to grow up too quickly, resulting in behaviors symptomatic of stress. Teachers report that more and more children demonstrate aggression and hostility on the playground and are diagnosed with depression and learning problems (Sanacore 1999). Providing children with an educational environment that offers love, care, acceptance, guidance, and connections to caring adults can help alleviate some of these problems. As an educator and parent involved in the school reform movement, I have found that Waldorf education is one type of education designed to provide an environment such as the one described above.

Waldorf education offers what Goodman (1992, 28) refers to as a "connectionist perspective" toward education. According to Goodman, a connectionist perspective

> places one's connection to the lives of all human beings and other living things on our planet at the center of the educational process…The radical reforming of our schools needs to be centered on helping children understand the ways in which life on this planet is interconnected and interdependent, and that in caring for others we are caring for ourselves. (p. 28)

In my work with Waldorf educators, I have found that they approach teaching with a connectionist perspective and furthermore use what I refer to as a connective pedagogy. A connective pedagogy takes into consideration a deep, lasting relationship between teacher and student and a curriculum that connects and integrates all subject areas. A connective pedagogy also consciously teaches respect and reverence for the earth and for one another and points out how we are all interdependent. Finally, a connective pedagogy infuses caring and acceptance for self and others in all areas of schooling. To summarize, a connective pedagogy encompasses the following three areas: continuity of people, curriculum, and instruction; a reverence and respect for the earth and for one another; and a deep caring for and acceptance of others. Before discussing these three areas, I would like to share with the reader my experiences with Waldorf education.

Dr. Goral directs the teacher education program at Mount Mary College in Milwaukee and works with graduate students in education. She has been researching and studying Waldorf education for several years. Because Waldorf education offers a healing, holistic pedagogy that benefits students from all walks of life, Dr. Goral is particularly interested in bringing Waldorf-inspired pedagogy to the public schools.

Experience and Background in Waldorf Education

Although I have not taught in a Waldorf school, I have been involved in Waldorf education for nearly a decade as a parent, researcher, and consultant. I spent a year at a Waldorf school in Michigan conducting a comprehensive study that subsequently became a doctoral dissertation. Following this, I studied for part of a summer in Scandinavia, exploring the support and funding of Waldorf schools in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. In order to learn more about anthroposophy, the spiritual science that undergirds Waldorf education, I spent two weeks at the Rudolf Steiner Institute in Waterville, Maine, studying the theories and philosophies of Dr. Rudolf Steiner, creator of Waldorf schools. I have also taught graduate courses in Waldorf education, including a class at the Rudolf Steiner College in Sacramento that compared the philosophy and history of U.S. public schools to Waldorf education and a graduate-level course at Mount Mary College that includes Waldorf methods for teaching mathematics. I attended the Rudolf Steiner College in Sacramento and participated in the institute for public school teachers interested in applying Waldorf-inspired pedagogy to their classrooms. I am currently serving as a consultant for a Waldorf school in Wisconsin and am involved in an initiative to start a Waldorf school in Indiana. Finally, I am a parent of a Waldorf student.

Continuity of People, Curriculum, and Instruction

A significant characteristic of Waldorf education is its emphasis on continuity, which is manifested in myriad ways. Ideally, students stay with one teacher for eight years, remain with the same classmates, and are taught an integrated curriculum specifically designed to foster continuity from grade to grade. Noddings (1992) believes that continuity is a necessary ingredient for successful schooling. She states, "To meet the challenge to care in schools, we must plan for continuity" (p. 72). Included in Noddings' definition of continuity is continuity of teachers and students and continuity in curriculum.

Waldorf schools share Noddings' philosophy of continuity, insofar as they believe that students in grades one through eight should be with one dedicated person who will oversee their education and provide security and continuity in their passage from childhood to adolescence (Kotzsch 1989). The children and teachers establish a community within the first year (first grade) and continue to grow and learn together throughout their Waldorf schooling. Relationships between student and teacher deepen with each passing year. Class teachers are responsible for the progress and academic growth of each student, which offers the student, in essence, a third parent (Ogletree 1974). The class teacher also models a love of and desire for continual learning.

The curriculum at a Waldorf school is highly integrated, giving students the opportunity to experience continuity from subject to subject, or what might be called a horizontal continuity. Students do not learn in a fragmentary fashion, nor is the curriculum prepackaged. According to Richards, by weaving subjects together, the teachers ensure that the "underlying life quality" (1980, 35) will be brought forth.

Waldorf educators employ a theme-based instruction through what is called the "main lesson." The main lesson is taught every morning for approximately two hours and focuses on reading and composition, mathematics, science, history, or geography. If, for example, a fourth grade class is studying fractions, they spend two hours each day for three or four weeks on this topic. During the two-hour main lesson, nearly all other areas of the curriculum are woven into the topic, including music, movement, art, storytelling, literature, drama, and writing. Special area teachers also plan their curricula around the main lesson. As in the example about fractions, the music teacher might introduce the concept of time signatures to reinforce and build on the topic. If a class is studying geometry, the eurhythmy (movement to music) teacher might have students practice geometric shapes through rhythm and movement. This helps children to feel, sense, and experience these shapes at a kinesthetic, cellular level, which in turn causes the concepts to be internalized. Steiner was adamant about teaching children a curriculum in which all subjects connect and interweave—nothing is isolated or in a vacuum, and every part is part of a whole (Reinsmith 1989).

The material in the main lesson is repeated at some point during the school year, adding continuity to the instruction. According to one Waldorf teacher,

> I think a lot of problems arise when you teach something once and never bring it up again. What we try to do is to teach a [main lesson] block for a month and then let it rest for a while, then bring it up in a different month. That time in between is almost like an incubation period in the creative process.... You let the children sleep with it and you know what happens in the period of the creative process—it's the "ah ha" moments. (Personal interview)

Continuity in instruction can also be found in a method Waldorf teachers refer to as "seeding." Seeding refers to the process in which the teacher gives students a taste of something they will study in later years. One Waldorf teacher explained this process in the following manner:

> When I think about what images to use [in stories] I have to confess I'm always thinking about the upper grade class, because I know where they're headed. In teaching the number six to first graders, I used a lily and a wild rose to represent the number [a lily has six petals]. I did this because a major part of the fifth grade unit on botany is spent discussing the differences between these two huge classes of flowering plants, which are the monocotyledons and the dicotyledons. (Personal interview)

Because Waldorf teachers stay with their classes from year to year, this type of continuity is able to exist. According to Richards, the class teacher has the "opportunity to develop and interweave these strands [of subject matter] sensitively in relation to the growth and development of the students" (1980, 105). Staying with the class gives teachers the benefit of being able to pick up where they left off the previous year and helps teachers to be aware of how much mastery was attained by each student. Assessment then is ongoing and continuous.

Finally, Waldorf schools create continuity by offering a curriculum based on the development of the child as well as on the evolution of human consciousness. According to Kliebard (1987), the Herbartians (people who followed the educational theorist J. F. Herbart) referred to this concept as the theory of cultural epochs. "Cultural-epochs theory posited the notion that the child recapitulates in his individual development the stages that the whole human race traversed throughout the course of history" (p. 44). Steiner, like the Herbartians, created the Waldorf curriculum to follow the history of humankind while incorporating the developmental stages of the child through the teaching of history, mathematics, geography, botany, biology, and zoology. In other words, children are learning about an essential part of human life, while at the same time experiencing it at their own developmental level. One Waldorf teacher explains Steiner's theory of cultural epochs in the following manner:

> Steiner gave indications for literary epochs that were especially appropriate to a child's developmental stage because in telling the stories, the child hears certain issues that he is working on and through the story, the issue is brought to consciousness. This is how the curriculum speaks to the developmental stages of the child. (Personal interview)

Teachers and students in Waldorf schools experience continuity in a number of ways. Through the development of deep, caring relationships, an integrated curriculum, and a curriculum related to the developmental level of the students, continuity at a Waldorf school is designed to foster a connective pedagogy between and among all who participate.

Reverence and Respect

A second aspect that contributes to a connective pedagogy is that of reverence and respect for nature, for self, and for one another. According to Barnes (1999), respect constitutes an attitude of seeing the value of, honoring, and even being in awe of someone or something. Urmacher (1991) wrote that Waldorf schools introduce elements of reverence and respect in their teaching through the use of symbols, rituals, and ceremonies. Waldorf teachers use their daily curriculum to introduce the elements as well. Barnes writes,

> Waldorf education in a conscious and intended way provides the child with opportunities all through the grades to develop an attitude of respect and wonder toward the world. These are an intrinsic part of the Waldorf curriculum. (1999, 5)

Because the intention to incorporate reverence and respect is constantly present, these values are a natural and integral part of every lesson, and as a result, teach students that reverence and respect are natural and integral parts of life.

Respect and Reverence for Self

Reverence and respect for self is taught to children at Waldorf schools at an early age. According to Richards, "Reverence for life is taught by example" (1980, 24). She continues by stating that in a Waldorf kindergarten, teachers encourage and protect the natural wonder and openness of the child. Children in one Waldorf kindergarten that I observed spent nearly an hour outside every day, rain or shine, being active and appreciating nature. After spending recreational time outside, students go indoors to engage in activities such as making bread, listening to stories, creative play, painting, and singing. Students are not rushed to begin academics at too early an age, and are thus given time to become comfortable in the school setting, learning social rules and mores. They are respected and reverenced and allowed to experience childhood, because in a Waldorf school, childhood itself is respected and reverenced.

When students enter first grade, the curriculum becomes more formal and they begin creating books to go along with the main lesson. These "main lesson books" contain drawings, letters, numbers, and sentences that reflect the content taught in the main lesson. Teachers direct the writing and drawing in students' main lesson books and expect high quality work. They do not allow children to disrespect themselves by turning in work that is not their best. As Sturbaum writes,

> The books are beautifully colored and attention is paid to the finest detail. Honoring the earth, being reverent, being polite, honoring one another, appreciating beauty, appreciating nature, trying hard, trying your best, doing neat work, keeping a neat, uncluttered classroom … All of these things seem to be threads which weave themselves throughout the day no matter what the children are doing. (1997, 85)

As previously mentioned, Waldorf teachers use rituals to teach students to respect themselves. One fine example is the morning verse, recited by children in grades one through four in all Waldorf schools (students in grades five through eight recite a different verse).

> The sun with loving light
> Makes bright for me each day
> The soul with spirit power
> Gives strength unto my limbs
> In sunlight shining clear
> I reverence, Oh God
>
> The strength of humankind
> That thou so graciously
> Has planted in my soul
> That I with all my might
> May love to work and learn
> From thee come light and strength
> To thee rise love and thanks.

Although the above verse reverences God, it also pays great respect and reverence to self. Teachers consciously teach this reverence, and expect it in return from their students. According to one Waldorf teacher,

> We raise the energy with certain verses and then we bring it down and we're very reverent. But I'm very aware of form and structure and reverence and I'm quite demanding of that. When the children stand up to recite a verse, they have to have their hands folded across their chests. I'm very aware of this issue of reverence with the children. (Personal interview)

Teachers instruct students to be respectful of one another and of property. One Waldorf teacher whom I observed had her students make medicine shields at the beginning of the year that contained the class rules. These remained hanging on the wall all through the school year. On the shields were written the following words:

> Respect other people: Don't laugh at mistakes; Don't tease or criticize; Don't gossip; Respect the community: Don't disturb a lesson; Participate in class; Be courteous to adults; Respect the earth and her products: Don't mar desks, floors, or walls; Don't waste; Take good care of supplies. (Summary of field notes)

Reverence and Respect for Nature

In addition to teaching children to show respect and reverence for themselves and for one another, reverence for the earth is a theme continually woven throughout the curriculum. Reverence and respect for the earth is cultivated through verses recited at the beginning of the school day as well as through specific main lesson blocks or units. One Waldorf teacher had her children say a verse before their morning snack. The verse follows:

> I reverence the sky
> I reverence the earth
> I reverence humankind
> For sun and rain
> Blessings on our snack.

The second grade curriculum contains a nature unit, third grade includes a unit on farming, fourth grade includes studies of the human and animal worlds, and fifth grade has students spend a concentrated amount of time on a detailed botany unit. When observing a second grade classroom studying nature, I took the following notes:

> The children sat at their desks with hands folded. The teacher told them they would be going into the forest that morning to listen for sounds and look all around at the trees, plants, and animals. They must be quiet in the forest and listen, feel the firmness of the ground, look for green things, and finally, choose a favorite tree. Then they should feel the tree and feel its energy. They were told to be "ever so quiet." After the teacher had introduced the idea of going outside, children made comments about birds, bird nests, being kind to animals, etc. (Summary of field notes)

Not only do children practice reverence for the earth in many of their main lesson units, but they also do so on their own. One teacher related a story about a third grade girl who made a gift of a beautiful fall leaf to every one of her classmates:

> I'll never forget when one child in third grade came in from recess and put a leaf on every child's desk. And they all came in and said "Oooh!" I thought to myself, "This is magic. This is a miracle." These children are so reverent for this beauty and they just don't go and toss it away. (Personal interview)

The above quote is indicative of a Waldorf teacher's

attention to and notice of reverence. Although young children normally show some appreciation for the earth, Waldorf teachers make a conscious effort to teach this type of compassion, as witnessed by the following teacher comment:

> I truly believe that if we teach children to be compassionate human beings, to appreciate things at a deep level, appreciate nature, one another, have respect, have reverence—that's going to carry over into their adult lives. And that's what we really need to have happen. (Personal interview)

Barnes echoes this teacher's comments in the following statement: "We need to find new ways to nurture respect at every level of experience and at every step on the path leading from childhood to adulthood" (1999, 7).

Respect and reverence for self, others, and nature are all integral parts of the connective pedagogy present in Waldorf education. As the above evidence indicates, through the daily curriculum, as well as through rituals, ceremonies, and symbols, Waldorf schools teach students profound lessons in respect and reverence.

Acceptance and Caring

Acceptance and caring for self and others is yet another quality inherent in a connective pedagogy. According to Sanacore, caring can be defined in many ways, "ranging from a greater focus on feelings than on thinking (Liddell 1990) to a relational perspective" (1999, 15), which Noddings (1992) refers to in her book *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. Thayer-Bacon (1993, 1997, 1998) writes about connecting the value of caring relationships to student learning and believes that an attitude of openness, trust, inclusion, and acceptance is important in all caring relationships.

Interestingly, the Waldorf philosophy takes caring relationships between students and teachers to a deeper level. Due to the anthroposophical underpinnings of Waldorf education, teachers in Waldorf schools believe in destiny and purpose of relationships. In other words, there are no accidents—encounters with certain individuals are meant to be. There is an honoring of the importance of relationships in human destiny. To this end, Waldorf teachers see a difficult relationship with a student not as something that can be passed on to next year's teacher, but as something that must be worked out. Because teachers stay with their students for eight years, the teacher must continually work on the acceptance of all students.

Yet in order for acceptance to be meaningful, it must be intertwined with an ethic of caring (Liddell 1990; Noddings 1992; Thayer-Bacon 1993). As Thayer-Bacon writes,

> Caring about someone does not mean one has to like or love that person. It does however mean that people do need to develop the ability to be receptive and open to other people and their ideas, willing to attend to them, to listen, and consider their possibilities. (1993, 325)

Furthermore, in light of the observation made by Noddings that, "At the present time, it is obvious that [schools'] main purpose is not the moral one of producing caring people, but instead, a relentless—and as it turns out, hapless—drive for academic adequacy" (1992, xii), many educators are beginning to feel that schools' primary purpose should shift from academics to caring. Noddings, for example, argues that a reordering of priorities is essential, and that all children should learn to care for themselves, one another, and the planet.

In my work with Waldorf education, I have found that teachers' acceptance of and care for their students takes place in a variety of ways, which is included in the methodology used in instruction, in the curriculum, and in the active implementation of the Waldorf philosophy. One Waldorf teacher emphasized teachers' care and acceptance by comparing the mission of Waldorf schools to that of public schools:

> I think what the public schools educate for is different than what we educate for. Even the policies in public schools are developed by the government. And whatever is the burning issue, whether it be Sputnik, or the Japanese doing better in math than us, that's what drives the public schools. There also seems to be more of a tendency in public schools to treat students all the same. It's like using a cookie cutter. And in our school we try from a very early age for children to start to understand themselves and to know who they are and to really nourish the individuality in them.... When children leave our school, we have a number of high school teachers tell us that the children really know who they are as learners. (Personal interview)

Waldorf teachers have the advantage of working with a philosophy that intends to educate the whole child, body, spirit, and soul—or what Kotzsch (1989) refers to as an education for head, hand, and heart.

Waldorf teachers use various methods to infuse an ethic of acceptance and caring into their classrooms. One such method is the ritual nearly all Waldorf teachers use of greeting their students at the classroom door at the start of each day with a handshake and a personal comment. Greetings such as, "Good morning, Elaina, how is your cat?" were heard during one of my visits to a Waldorf school. Richards com-

ments on this type of personal attention: "A moment's pause at the doorway. A contact, a greeting, an affirmation of identity and affectionate respect; an acknowledgement of meaningful time spent together" (1980, 51).

Teachers also use storytelling to teach acceptance and caring. Through stories, teachers can teach certain lessons that tend to reach children at a deeper level than that at which a mere lecture would. According to Davies-Gibson,

> Storytelling can instill a sense of unity and peace in the classroom.... Peace is brought to the classroom by changing the relationship between the speaker and the listener. Through the process of identification, the members of an audience realize how they are being joined. Dialogue that follows the storytelling session helps listeners to construct and assess lines of reasoning from multiple conflicting points of view. (1994, 15)

While observing in one Waldorf classroom whose teacher was struggling with the issue of her students' care and acceptance of others, I had the opportunity to hear her tell a story. The story (by James Thurber) was about a little prince who wanted the moon. In the story, the jester solved the problem for the prince, whereas all the wise people in the kingdom had tried but failed. The teacher summarized the story by telling the class that there are always many different ways to solve a problem and that everyone's thoughts are different. Acceptance of others' perspectives was also part of her lesson.

Teachers' active acceptance of and care for children helps students to accept and care for themselves, for one another, and for the environment. The following quote from a Waldorf teacher is representative of this point:

> You try from an early age for children to take care of themselves and the environment around them. When we went to the park, all the children came back with a load of garbage to throw away. Jenny took the spider home to release it on the leaves. You see little things like this and you know there is empathy for the world around them. (Personal interview)

As witnessed from the above paragraphs, "Waldorf education is not about creating employable, skilled adults but helping children to become self-aware, creative, and responsible human beings" (Schaefer 1996, 42). Indeed, as one Waldorf teacher said about the graduates of her school,

> A successful graduate is one who is moral or cares about other people and about how things go in the world and feels that she has some influence on what goes on around her and in fact she must try and have an influence.... Each year when the eighth grade class has its graduation ceremony, it nearly brings tears to my eyes because there is such a depth to these kids when they come out of eighth grade. There's wisdom and sensitivity beyond their years. One is really moved by what gracious beings they have come to be. (Personal interview)

This sensitivity and grace appear to come from not just one aspect of a Waldorf education, but from all the components that together create a connective pedagogy.

Waldorf educators are able to extend a deep level of caring and acceptance to their students and are supported in this endeavor through the school's curricula, instruction, and philosophy. One recently divorced parent of a Waldorf student noted how grateful she was that her child would be returning to the same caring teacher for the following school year. Considering the disruption in this child's home life, she rightly felt that his connection and stability with another caring and accepting adult was of great significance.

Conclusion

We live in a time when violence in schools is an all too familiar reality, when more is perceived as better, when the rush and isolation of day-to-day life is all consuming, and when our children are growing up too quickly. Our fast-paced lifestyle has resulted in myriad problems, not the least of which is our feeling disconnected from ourselves, from one another, and from the planet. Not only adults feel disconnected; children feel it as well. Maeroff (1998) believes that by providing students with a sense of connectedness, teachers can help students become more successful in school because they help them gain a feeling of belonging in an academic setting.

According to Jung (1973), the longing of humans to have a connection to one another is universal. Furthermore, Jung believes that we must feel as if we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. Steiner (1994) believes that if we fail to develop within our beings a very strong sense that there is something higher or beyond ourselves, we will be unable to find the strength to evolve to something higher. A connective pedagogy can offer children the experience of being connected to one another and to the environment around them. Through a continuity of people, curricula, and instruction; a reverence and respect for themselves, one another, and nature; and the modeling of care for self and others, perhaps our students might have a chance to reconnect to themselves and to one another. All of these elements weave together to create a pedagogy that connects students with one another, with their teachers, and with the planet.

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Two Poems

By Lori McCray

Lori McCray is a writer, musician, and preschool teacher. She is the mother of eight-year-old Scott.

A Child's World

Under the covers we disappear,
my son and I.
He is the fiercest tiger and I,
his feeble prey.
He is the fastest cheetah and I,
a bumbling boar.
He's a ferocious lion and I,
a trembling mouse.
It's just a game
(and I have many things I'd rather do)
but fifteen minutes
of absolute power
gives balance to his world (and mine).

I could be washing dishes.
Yet what I've done is monumentally important.
I've said to Scott: "I want to join you in your world.
I want to meet you where you are.
I'll leave behind my watch, my calendar, my busy-ness
and be here for you NOW."

Instead of driving to the store
we take the wagon.
One hundred pounds of flesh (we bring Quan, too).
I pull and pant and wonder why I didn't drive
(I weigh just three pounds more than both of them)
but am rewarded by their boisterous rendition of
"She'll Be Coming "Round the Mountain";
all twenty-six verses, at the tops of their lungs.

I could be doing laundry, but in the end,
Scott probably won't remember if I always kept
his sheets clean, or dusted the T.V.
When he grows old, he'll close his eyes
and see me pulling his red wagon, pockets bulging
with his treasures, answering his pointed ponderings
with my own.

He'll smile and know that
NOW is all we have
and love won't wait,
and time goes faster
than we think.

August 6, 1997

Borders

"What would it
sound like
if I cried
in your
womb?"
my son
wondered,
before
drifting off
to sleep.

It took me
by surprise,
as his questions
often do.

Can you even
make a noise
in utero?

"I think it
would sound
muffled,"
was my feeble
reply.

Like moth wings
against a window.
Like a kitten
high in a tree.
Like a band of
angels
singing softly
at the border

between Earth
and Heaven…

August 8, 1999

Education for All

One Aspect of Alternative Education

By Josephine T. Hinds

When I envision a school, I think of a stately building surrounded by playing fields, parking lots, and temporary buildings, of crowded hallways, active classroom settings, and students and teachers participating in the daily, vibrant, and dynamic social interactions of school life. What doesn't come to my mind are the absent students—those who are inpatients at hospitals or are homebound due to illness or impairment, those students who are emotionally disturbed, or those who have been placed in agency settings by their parents, the courts, or child-related agencies. Do these students belong in the picture? Houston Independent School District (HISD) believes that they do.

With more than 210,000 students enrolled in 298 campuses and educational programs, HISD is the largest school system in Texas and the seventh largest in the nation. Almost 30,250 administrators, teachers, counselors, librarians, nurses, psychologists, and ancillary professionals such as educational assistants, secretaries, police, and substance-abuse monitors direct their skills and expertise toward providing students with the highest quality education possible in the safest and most learning-conducive environments. Most of the students as well as most of HISD's employees fit the traditional template of on-campus education. With a student population as vast as this one, however, some students, about 10,000 of them this year, require altogether different approaches to meet their varied educational needs. These students are enrolled in HISD's Alternative District.

As one of thirteen administrative districts, the Alternative District offers programs that adapt to the critical requirements of non-traditional students. Seventeen campuses, subdivided into three clusters, comprise the Alternative District. Cluster A, made up of six different schools, caters to those students most often considered the brightest and the best, students who display the talent and the drive to be accepted into the fine arts, science, law enforcement, technology, and enriched, accelerated programs. Cluster B accepts students who are referred from their home schools (not to be confused with "homeschooling"). These students have social and behavioral needs that cannot be met in a traditional classroom setting. There are ten schools within this cluster. Cluster C contains a hybrid of students, all of whom are enrolled in one "campus," known as Community Services.

As an administrator at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, I see children and their families endure extended inpatient stays as they undergo therapy. I have often wondered about the social milieu for children and adolescents within the hospital, in particular with regard to their education. As I learned about HISD's involvement with patients at the Cancer Center and with other hospitals in the Texas Medical Center, I began to understand the structure of the Alternative District. With my interest piqued, I decided to examine this segment of the public school system, in particular the Community Services campus, its students, and its

Josephine T. Hinds, whose career began in teaching, is currently an administrator at the University of Texas Cancer Center in Houston, Texas. Once her doctorate work in curriculum and instruction is completed, she looks forward to returning to her first love—educating those in need.

teachers. I have interviewed administrators and teachers. I will accompany several of them during the fall semester as they meet their students in various settings. I hope to gain an appreciation of the challenges before them as teachers within a very large, predominantly traditional system, caring for a student population that falls far outside the range of the usual student body. In a forthcoming issue of *Paths of Learning*, I hope to publish a follow-up to the present article, focusing on what I learn from this experience. This essay, then, is meant to be a prelude to a more in-depth look at a non-traditional approach to helping students within one public school system.

Administrative Structure

Community Services provides thousands of students with instruction at hundreds of non-traditional sites. Designated as a campus in 1991, Community Services has its own administrative structure and resources just as any other school campus does. No classroom or individualized instruction for children takes place at the designated building site in southwest Houston, though teachers meet regularly at this location for staff development and inservices. Prior to 1991, most of the students enrolled in this program were restricted to their homes because of illness, physical disability, or multiple impairments. During the last decade, the majority of students has shifted to those who fall under the auspices of agencies—homeless/runaway shelters and substance abuse facilities being the most frequent.

A principal administers the Community Services "campus"—a campus that exists wherever there is a need within HISD's geographical boundaries. Four assistant principals manage the student population and the resources in order to fulfill the mission of providing the best learning opportunities to students who need to receive special instructional services in places other than the regular school setting. Meeting this challenge successfully requires enormous amounts of flexibility and coordination from teachers and administrators.

The school's stated goals are:

- To improve student achievement
- To implement individualized, self-paced curriculum
- To teach older students the skills that they need to function productively in society
- To provide teachers with pertinent knowledge they may share with other professionals
- To involve parents and community members in activities at the various sites.

Community Services' administration and staff work diligently to meet these goals. With a cadre of 130 certified teachers, including itinerant teachers such as a speech pathologist, teacher technologist, vocational adjustment coordinator, adaptive physical education teachers, a nurse, and 52 educational assistants, Community Services serves approximately 2,500 students annually.

The Students

The student population at Community Services is divided into three broad categories: homebound, hospitalized, and agency. An assistant principal is in charge of each component. The fourth assistant principal holds the title of Dean of Instruction. Her job is to coordinate curriculum and textbooks, prepare staff development in-services, and oversee mandatory testing (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, Stanford Binet, etc.).

HISD serves all students who reside within school district boundaries, including many students from outside the district who reside temporarily within HISD's confines—students from other countries, states, or school districts who undergo long-term medical treatment at the Texas Medical Center and other hospitals, those who are assigned by the courts to reside at agencies while receiving therapy or counseling, and students living in shelters. The only entrance requirements are that these students reside at home or at a facility within the district for a minimum of five weeks during the course of the school year (hospitalized and agency) or for four consecutive weeks and receive a referral from a physician (homebound).

Recent statistics from the 1998-99 academic year testify to the contribution this campus has made in providing education to all. Out of the 909 students enrolled in just the hospital component alone of Community Services, for example, only 345 (38%) had transferred from within HISD, while 494 (54%) came from within Texas but outside the school district. Of the remaining 70 students (8%), 58 were from other countries and 12 were from states other than Texas. Resources, talent, and energy are devoted to all students, regardless of their home school. Community Services is based on the needs of students who are by unfortunate circumstance eligible for the district's services.

While as many as 2,500 individual students may be enrolled at the Community Services campus annually, between 450-700 students are enrolled at any given time. Compared to a district-wide student mobility rate of 26.3%, Community Services' mobility rate is 94.2%. (A mobile student is defined as a student enrolled as a member of a campus for less than 83% of the school year. The mobility rate is calculated as the number of mobile students divided by the cumulative number of students enrolled at the campus.) Community Services serves students as young as three years old and as old as twenty-two. Students' needs vary as dramatically as their ages, from the special requirements of medically fragile students with multiple disabilities to the unique needs of gifted students. A few students have been enrolled in Community Services for years and might be graduated from this campus. Others officially withdraw and return to their home school. Some simply disappear a couple of days after enrolling. With as many reasons for staying or leaving as there are individual students, the teaching and support

staffs of Community Services attempt to help each of them. Homebound and hospital teachers lose students every year to the diseases they have watched their students battle, sometimes for years. All of the teachers have witnessed cures and recoveries as well.

Below is a table displaying the division of students, teachers, and educational assistants among the three components of Community Services. These data come from the 12/3/99 census for one week only.

	Students	Classroom Teachers	Educational Assistants	Number of Teaching Sites
Homebound	169	36	0	169
Agency	254	60	40	23
Hospital	98	23	12	13

Teachers are placed where the needs exist. When the number of students shifts from one component to another, the administration responds appropriately with a realignment of teachers and assistants so that the student-to-teacher ratio remains within established ranges. Teachers are required to spend a minimum of four hours per week with each student. Each of them has the autonomy to schedule her or his days as will best fit the situations and the needs of the students.

The Teachers

I studied the professional profile of the Community Services teaching staff and discovered a remarkably experienced and well-qualified team. All of them hold teaching certificates, and most are certified for Special Education. Thirty-six percent of them hold advanced degrees—four of them doctorates. Most remarkable is that their average teaching experience is eighteen years. According to the principal and assistant principals, teachers who thrive in this type of environment are those who work well with little supervision, are flexible and versatile in their teaching approaches, can adapt to strange and sometimes unsettling surroundings, and truly care about individuals who are often in desperate need. Homebound teachers told me of instances when they arrived at a student's home to find no adult in attendance. Their responses were to go forward with the lessons, but to conduct class outside when possible to avoid any threat of impropriety or to keep the bed-bound student company by talking through an open window until the parent returned.

The student-to-teacher ratio is very low at this campus, but teachers at Community Services are no less busy than their peers at traditional campuses. For example, a homebound teacher may instruct only five students, but that teacher must prepare for all the courses each child takes. This means a single teacher could be responsible for as many as thirty-five or more lessons. The teacher must manage not only the academic material but also the logistical problems of transferring textbooks and supplies daily to the students' homes. In addition, these teachers often travel to homes that do not have heat or air conditioning, to agencies that house students with histories of violence, and to hospitals with students who will not survive their disease and know it. Most classroom teachers never learn about their students' home life. Community Services teachers become intimately involved not only with their students, but also with every family member and with many aspects of the family's life. They become part of the families. When children are living in agencies or in shelters, the teachers become members of those communities as well.

There is not a single student enrolled in Community Services by choice. Those who are ill don't want to be confined to the hospital or their beds, and those who have been placed in agencies would prefer to be out—maybe on the streets and maybe back at their home school. Every teacher in Community Services has chosen to teach in this select setting, however. All of them have experienced the traditional classroom settings and have left them behind. Turnover among teachers is very low, and applications for the rare open positions are plentiful.

Academics is not the primary concern of any one of these 2,500 students. Those who are faced with cancer therapies with high morbidity rates, those who have been placed unwillingly in substance abuse treatment centers, those who have been removed from abusive and dangerous home environments—all of them have much larger problems to solve than do most other students. Teachers at Community Services face this reality every day and still manage to make meaningful differences in many of the lives they touch.

How do the teachers measure success? What motivates them to continue to reach out to these troubled or ill children and attempt to make meaningful differences in their lives? What characteristics do they share that make them effective, caring teachers? How do they deal withthe inevitable losses—the deaths of the terminally ill students, the disappearances of the homeless and runaways, the students' return to abuse? How do they coordinate the lessons with the required testing in the necessary compassionate setting? How are they supported by the administrative structure of the seventh largest school district in the nation? How are parents involved in the process? These are a few of the questions I hope to answer during the coming months and present in my follow-up essay.

Though part of an extremely large school district, Community Services appears to be unique and separate. Administrators work hard in the field; they do not merely sit behind their desks, rarely to be seen by faculty, staff members, and students. Rather, they help—actively help—the teachers with whom they work reach the whole student. In such a supportive environment, teachers are both able and encouraged to see sides of students that are usually hidden. Moreover, teachers necessarily learn with their students; they must do so, in fact, in order to teach all of the academic subjects required. But, along with their students, they also learn about life—and often about death. They are involved, indeed, in a deeply meaningful community education program.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education (ALLPIE)
P.O. Box 59
East Chatham, NY 12060-0059
(518) 392-6900
allpie@taconic.net

The Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education is a parent-to-parent organization which assists people who wish to be involved in their children's education—public, private and home schooling. Services include a catalog of resources, workshops and conferences, a mail-order lending library, phone consultations, and ALLPIE mailings.

Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO)
417 Roslyn Rd.
Roslyn Heights, NY 11577
(800) 769-4171
http://www.edrev.org

The major clearinghouse for information, contacts, and consulting on alternative schools of diverse types, community learning centers, home education, and international alternatives. Produces a nationally distributed radio talk show, *The Education Revolution*, an informative newsletter, numerous videos, and the most comprehensive directory (over 300 pages) of alternative schools and learning resources.

Antioch New England Graduate School
40 Avon St.
Keene, NH 03431
(603) 357-3122
http://www.antiochne.edu

Graduate programs in education include specialties in environmental education; Waldorf education; and the Integrated Day, a progressive approach that makes connections between the life of the child and the life of the classroom.

Association of Waldorf Schools of North America
3911 Bannister Rd.
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
(916) 961-0927
http://www.waldorfeducation.org

The major organization linking Waldorf (Steiner) schools, teacher education programs, publications, and other resources. Publishes *Renewal: A Journal for Waldorf Education*.

Association for Experiential Education
2305 Canyon Blvd., Suite 100
Boulder, CO 80302
(303) 440-8844
http://www.aee.org

Promotes experiential learning in numerous settings, especially through outdoor adventure programs. Publishes books, directories and the *Journal for Experiential Education*. Sponsors conferences.

Autodidactic Press
P.O. Box 872749
Wasilla, AK 99687
(907) 376-2932
http://www.autodidactic.com

A small press and website advocate for self-education and lifelong learning. Dedicated to the proposition that lifelong learning is the lifeblood of democracy and a key to living life to its fullest, and to the autodidactic philosophy that an education should be thought of not as something you get but as something you take.

Center for Education Reform
1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 204
Washington, D.C. 20036
(800) 521-2118
http://edreform.com

A nonprofit advocacy group supporting fundamental reforms in schools, with an emphasis on high academic standards, more parental choice, and greater local control. Provides numerous resources on charter schools, including research, state-by-state reports, and materials for planning new programs. Offers a comprehensive database on educational reform and several publications, including *The Education Forum*.

The Center for Inspired Learning
http://www.inspiredinside.com/learning

A website created to help people connect with other people and ideas related to more holistic and community-based forms of learning. Contains links to pages describing different types of schools, a library of reflective articles, and more.

Designs for Learning
1745 University Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104
(651) 649-5400, ext. 3009

Coordinated by Wayne Jennings, director of five charter schools and the originator of the St. Paul Open School, this contact has research on principles of learning and charter school designs, relevant to creating alternatives in both the private and public sectors.

Down to Earth Books
P.O. Box 163
Goshen, MA 01032
http://www.crocker.com/~maryl/index.html

Publisher and online bookstore specializing in education, psychology, spirituality, poetry and other topics. Titles include back issues of *SKOLE* (the journal of alternative education that preceded P*aths of Learning*) and the three volume *Challenging the Giant: The Best of SKOLE*, along with *Making it Up as We Go Along: The Story of the Albany Free School*, and *Real Education: Varieties of Freedom*, a book from Great Britain not readily available in the U.S. Website also features reviews and articles.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Educational Futures Projects
P.O. Box 2977
Sacramento, CA 95812
(916) 393-8701

Coordinated by Don Glines, creator of the well-known Wilson and Lincoln public alternative schools, this clearinghouse has information on the original philosophy of alternatives for everyone, the history of the movement, and publications on how to create alternative programs.

***Education Now* and Education Heretics Press**
113 Arundel Drive
Bramcote Hills
Nottingham, England UK NG93FQ
www.gn.apc.org/edheretics
www.gn.apc/educationnow

Education Now is a quarterly newsletter on alternative schools, homeschooling, visionary learning systems, and person-centered education. The Education Heretics Press catalog features original books and monographs on diverse paths of learning. Though published in England, the philosophy and most of the issues are relevant to American concerns.

Endicott College and The Institute for Educational Studies (TIES)
(877) 276-5200
http://www.tmn.com/ties

Graduate program in Integrative Learning. Colloquium-based, low residency and innovative online learning community. By addressing human and ecological issues through a systemic approach, these studies emphasize the need for congruency between what we know and how we act. Students develop practical strategies for designing learning environments that meet the needs of a culture in rapid transition.

EnCompass
11011 Tyler Foote Rd.
Nevada City, CA 95960
(530) 292-1000

A nonprofit, holistic learning center dedicated to the psychological and emotional health of children and families. EnCompass teaches and models the NLR (Natural Learning Rhythms) approach developed by Ba and Josette Luvmour through an integrated program of workshops, classes, internships, retreats, Family Camps, Outdoor Education, special programs, conferences and publications.

Genius Tribe
P.O. Box 1014
Eugene, OR 97440-1014
(541) 686-2315

A mail order library for unschoolers, homeschoolers, and other people committed to education in the fullest, freest, most joyful sense of the word. Book and resource reviews by Grace Llewellyn, author of *The Teenage Liberation Handbook*.

Goddard College
Plainfield, VT 05667
(802) 454-8311
http://www.goddard.edu

Graduate program in teacher education emphasizes alternative, progressive, and holistic approaches. All graduate as well as undergraduate programs regard each student as a unique individual in charge of his or her own learning.

Great Ideas in Education/Holistic Education Press
P.O. Box 328
Brandon, VT 05733-0328
(800) 639-4122
http://www.great-ideas.org

Publisher and distributor of books in the areas of holistic and progressive education and the journal *Encounter*: *Education for Meaning and Social Justice*. A partner with the Foundation for Educational Renewal (publisher of *Paths of Learning*).

Growing Without Schooling
Holt Associates
2380 Massachusetts Ave., Suite 104
Cambridge, MA 02140
(617) 864-3100
http://www.holtgws.com

GWS is a bimonthly newsletter linking homeschooling families, filled with resources, information, and personal stories. Holt Associates offers consultations; sponsors an annual conference; and publishes the catalog John Holt's Bookstore, containing tools and ideas for independent learning.

Haven
http://www.haven.net
http://www.haven.net/edge/matrix.htm

Haven is a web-based global learning center with personal inquiry, dialogue, collaboration and service as guiding processes. Focus is on 21st century "edge-ucation," right livelihood and sustainable business, deep ecology, and the interconnections between them in our daily lives. Offers online salons, mentoring, and apprenticeships for teens and adults.

Heinemann
361 Hanover St.
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
(800) 793-2154
http://www.heinemann.com

Publisher of numerous titles on whole language approaches to literacy and other student-centered methods of teaching, including several excellent books on alternative education. Titles include *Making it Up as We Go Along*: *The Story of the Albany Free School* by Chris Mercogliano, *One Size Fits Few*: *The Folly of Educational Standards* by Susan Ohanian, and *Round Peg, Square Hole* by John Gust.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

Home Education Magazine
P.O. Box 1083
Tonasket, WA 98855
(800) 236-3278
http://www.home-ed-magazine.com

Published since 1983 by a second-generation homeschooling family, this is an in-depth and well balanced general interest homeschool magazine. Ten columnists and over a dozen feature articles in every 68-page issue. *H.E.M.* website offers an extensive online library of articles; a database; discussion forums; and more, including the American Homeschool Association, a nonprofit networking and service organization with a newsletter, writers' clearinghouse, and information on home education laws in all 50 states. See http://www.home-ed-magazine.com/AHA/aha.html.

John Dewey Project
on Progressive Education
535 Waterman Building
University of Vermont
Burlington, VT 05405
(802) 656-1355

A policy research institute promoting ideas such as justice, equity, human development, creativity, care, ethics and community in public discussion of educational issues. Publishes studies and position papers, sponsors conferences and forums.

Jola Publications
2933 N. 2nd St.
Minneapolis, MN 55411
(612) 529-5001

Publishes the periodical *Public School Montessorian* and an annual *Montessori Community Directory*, a comprehensive listing of hundreds of schools across the U.S., as well as organizations, teacher education centers, publications, materials suppliers, and other resources for Montessori education.

Alfie Kohn
http://www.AlfieKohn.org

A useful website featuring articles, books, videos, and lectures on teaching and parenting by Alfie Kohn, one of today's most astute observers of schooling. (His best-selling titles include *No Contest* and *Punished by Rewards*.) Also lists national and state-by-state resources and contact people to build a campaign against the educational standards movement.

Living Routes - Ecovillage Education Consortium
72 Baker Rd.
Shutesbury, MA 01072
(413) 259-0025
(888) 515-7333 (toll free)
http://www.LivingRoutes.org
info@LivingRoutes.org

Living Routes is a growing consortium of sustainable communities (known as "ecovillages") and universities working together to offer accredited experiential programs that empower participants to help build a sustainable future. Semester programs are currently offered at the Findhorn Foundation in northern Scotland and Auroville in southern India. A North American Summer Institute and a January term program at Crystal Waters, a permaculture community in Australia, are also available.

National Association for Core Curriculum
1640 Franklin Ave., Suite 104
Kent, OH 44240
(330) 677-5008

Promotes integrative, interdisciplinary studies, team teaching, block scheduling, and other learning-centered approaches. A network of innovative educators influenced by the principles of progressive education. Newsletter lists conferences, resources, and research support for these methods.

National Association for Year-Round Education
P.O. Box 711386
San Diego, CA 92171
(619) 276-5296
http://www.NAYRE.org

Year-round education represents an alternative way of thinking about the school's relationship to the community as a whole, encouraging experimental programs and lifelong learning. NAYRE publishes books, articles and monographs, and sponsors an annual conference.

National Coalition of Alternative
Community Schools
1266 Rosewood, #l
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(734) 668-9171
www.ncacs.org

NCACS is a nonprofit network of schools, groups and individuals committed to participant control, whereby students, parents, and staff create and implement their own learning programs. NCACS sponsors a directory and other publications, conferences, exchanges, accreditation, and alternative teacher education.

Directory of Resources for Educational Alternatives

National Coalition of Education Activists
P.O. Box 679
Rhinebeck, NY 12572
ncea@aol.com

NCEA is a multi-racial network of parents, school staff, and others involved in public school issues. Its purpose is to promote a progressive and equitable vision of public education and to help local activists acquire the information, skills, and support they need to make this vision a reality.

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, #91A
Fairfax, VA 22042
(703) 359-8973
http://www.ncea.com

Supports schools (primarily public schools) and community leaders working to provide expanded learning opportunities in response to individual and community needs. After school and extended day programs, social services, alternative schools, and lifelong learning approaches are among the models promoted. Based on principles of local control and self-determination. Publishes books and other materials.

National Home Education Network
info@nhen.org
http://www.nhen.org

Encourages and facilitates the vital grassroots work of state and local homeschooling groups and individuals by providing information, fostering networking, and promoting public relations on a national level.

New Horizons for Learning
P.O. Box 15329
Seattle, WA 98115
(206) 547-7936
http://www.newhorizons.org

An online resource for educators concerned with the fullest development of human capabilities. Explores ideas not yet in mainstream educational practice. Online journal, books and other materials, networking for people and organizations.

Northeast Foundation for Children
71 Montague City Rd.
Greenfield, MA 01301
(800) 360-6332
http://responsiveclassroom.org

A nonprofit organization providing workshops, consulting, publications, and other resources dedicated to the improvement of K-8 teaching. Strong emphasis on the social context of learning and understanding of children's development. "Responsive Classroom" approach has been used successfully in hundreds of schools.

Pathfinder Center
P.O. Box 804, Amherst, MA 01004
256 North Pleasant Street
Amherst, MA 01002
(413) 253-9412
plc@valinet.com
http://www.pathfindercenter.org

Supports teenaged unschoolers and their families. Offers strategic consultations for families considering teen unschooling or interested in improving their unschooling. Publisher of *Liberated Learners*, in which two teen homeschoolers tell their story each issue. Locally PC provides a wide range of activities for unschoolers to learn and play.

Rethinking Schools
1001 E. Keefe Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53212
(800) 669-4192
http://www.rethinkingschools.org

An activist publication for teachers, parents, and students concerned with urban education. Views classrooms as "places of hope" and empowerment. Also publishes books and resources on particular topics.

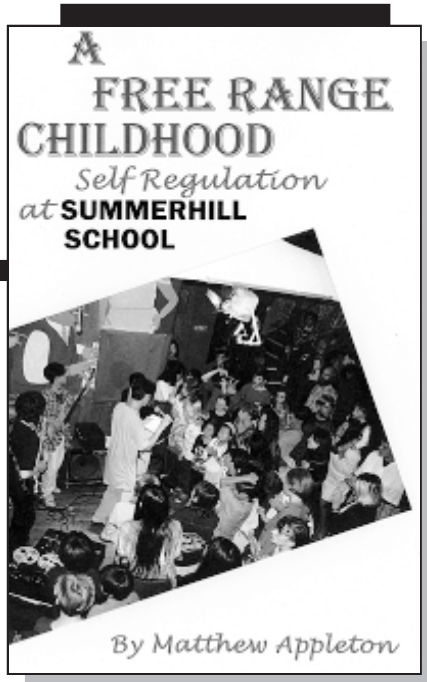
Youth on Board
58 Day Street
P.O. Box 440322
Somerville, MA 02144
(617) 623-9900 x1242
http://www.youthonboard.org
youthonboard@aol.com

Youth on Board is a nonprofit organization that helps young people and adults think differently about each other so that they can work together to change their communities. They offer highly interactive training programs for young people and adults and a wide array of publications on youth involvement issues, including the book *14 Points: Successfully Involving Youth in Decision Making.*

Zephyr Press
P.O. Box 66006
Tucson, AZ 85728-6006
(800) 232-2187
http://www.zephyrpress.com

Publishes books exploring "new ways of teaching for all ways of learning," including multiple intelligences, brain-based learning and integrated curriculum. Sponsors workshops and an annual conference.

Summerhill Revisited



Matthew Appleton's **A Free Range Childhood** provides an updated, insightful account of everyday life at Summerhill. This is the first major book to appear on the school since A.S. Neill's 1960 bestseller inspired an international movement for alternative education. Through graceful and reflective writing, Appleton expands on Neill's stirring call for educational freedom.

"Matthew was a popular member of staff, allowing Summerhill to work its magic on him. ...This is a candid view of his time with us—it is a very enjoyable read, and it raises some important, if uncomfortable, questions about modern methods of childrearing."

Zoe Readhead, Principal of Summerhill School and daughter of founder A.S. Neill

"The reappearance of Summerhill on the world stage couldn't be more timely. Matthew Appleton is an able guide, thanks to a prose filled with immediacy and passion. Old Neill would be proud."

Chris Mercogliano, Co-director of the Albany Free School, and author of Making It Up As We Go Along: The Story of the Albany Free School.

"In a time of crisis and confusion, *A Free Range Childhood* connects us with the ethical heart of education at its best..."

William Ayers, Distinguished Professor of Education, Senior University Scholar, University of Illinois at Chicago, and author of To Teach, The Journey of a Teacher, and A Kind and Just Parent.

The world's most famous alternative school continues to demonstrate that children thrive in an atmosphere of freedom, trust, and self-government.

A Free Range Childhood, $18.95
Foundation for Educational Renewal · P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733
(800) 639-4122 - www.PathsOfLearning.net

A sampling of features in the next issue of

PathsofLearning

Options for Families&Communities

- An interview with Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn, authors of the deeply moving and highly influential book *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting.*

- A profile article on The Journey School—a new charter school founded on the belief that "education is a journey, not a race"—invites readers to witness the challenges and rewards of fulfilling a dream.

- Chris Mercogliano, author of *Making It Up As We Go Along* and a veteran teacher at the Albany Free School, writes on the experiences of AFS students who engaged in community-based, service-oriented learning on a trip to Puerto Rico.

- Book reviews of Michael Lerner's *Spirit Matters* and avid Albert's *And the Skylark Sings with Me.*

- Van Andruss, a father and teacher living in rural Canada, shares with us a day in the life of community homeschoolers who come to study at his family's house.

- Plus, writing by young persons, action guides to selected articles, a directory of resources for educational alternatives, and much, much more!

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