



M o s a i c

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School

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photo by Gregory Chern

Lucky for the students in Mr. Sblendorio's class, some of the buttons he pushes have to do with the accordion he plays in class every morning, rather than with electronic media.

The Digital Dilemma

by Trice Atchison, from a talk by Christopher Sblendorio, Fourth Grade Teacher

Christopher Sblendorio pulled out a genuine soap box and, from it, a wooden horse, at the start of his talk, "The Digital Dilemma," in the GBRSS auditorium this fall. Then he promised the audience of parents that he would not get up on a soap box, or a high horse, but would speak plainly from his own experience about changes he's observed in children over the three decades he's led students through a Waldorf grade-school education—changes he largely attributes to the ever-growing influence of electronic media in children's lives. Currently he's on his fourth round as a class teacher, with the fourth grade class.

Mr. Sblendorio confessed to being in and of our times, a pusher of buttons, some of them having to do with his Netflix subscription and other electronic indulgences. (Lucky for his students, some of the buttons he pushes are on the accordion he plays for them while they dance to joyful folk music at school every day.)

Fast and Furious

"Media is a much bigger picture than it was 30 years ago," he said, "Today there are so many more devices that involve pushing buttons to get information or entertainment at a fast and furious pace." While Mr. Sblendorio acknowledged that the media is part

of our world, he urged us to confront something in our culture that isn't always understood: Children are children, and adults are adults. What is relatively harmless for us can be detrimental to children, whose hearts, minds, bodies and souls are in a state of rapid and crucial development.

"Passive, electronic entertainment is addictive—we become voyeurs, eyeballs," said Mr. Sblendorio. That is, perhaps, all right for adults in reasonable quantities (analogous to alcohol), but not for children who are at a stage where certain soul capacities are in development. These soul capacities, which their teachers try to nurture, include imagination, initiative, authenticity and discernment.

Soul Indigestion

"The people behind the electronic media are thinking and creative," he said, "but their intelligence and talents are in the service, mainly, of consumerism." Since all of our sense impressions and experiences are food for the soul—even more strongly during the open, permeable years of childhood—it stands to reason that it matters a great deal who creates the images and messages our children receive, and why.

The sheer quantity of media in our world today is daunting. Just as we cannot continuously eat food physically without stopping to digest it, we have to stop taking in sense impressions to process them. “During sleep we digest soul experiences,” he said. “Poor sleep equals soul indigestion, which causes restlessness and nervousness.” When Mr. Sblendorio decided to experiment with Netflix’s affect on his own sleep and dream life, he found that his sleep was more fitful and his dreams more disturbing when Netflix adventures precipitated sleep.

When we take in impressions that are rhythmic, beautiful and healthy, we sleep well and have good dreams, he said, while chaotic, arrhythmic impressions cause soul bellyache.

Rapid Changes

For children growing up before the 1950s, the media in their environment involved the radio and a telephone that rang occasionally. During Mr. Sblendorio’s ‘50s-era childhood, TV arrived—and he vividly remembers the first television broadcast he saw at four-years-old, mild though it was by today’s standards.

By the 1970s, when Mr. Sblendorio was a young teacher embarking on his first eight-year journey through the grades, the children’s homes had stereos, radio, TV and a telephone. But even then, the media was gentle and less prevalent compared to today. He witnessed in those children tremendous powers of concentration. “They were on the ball,” he said, “If I recited a poem for the first time, they were almost immediately one word behind, and within a few days had it retained—and could even call it up three years later.” The children of that era also had a great capacity to immediately grasp the gestures that accompanied the words, without any verbal instruction.

Nine years later, when Mr. Sblendorio began teaching his second class, computers had just started coming into some homes, and TV gave way to VCRs. The number of films created by the entertainment industry, particularly films aimed at children, grew rapidly. This class shared similar qualities with the first class, but to a lesser extent. They had come into a world that contained more media, a world enveloped by an electronic blanket.

Shake, Rattle and Roll

As the electronic blanket thickened, Mr. Sblendorio saw something in more and more children that he had experienced himself as a child: their hands and bodies trembled. Back in college, when he weaned himself off TV, he discovered, to his surprise, that the trembling stopped. “What could that be?” he wondered. Today he concludes that the flickering light and rapid change of images of electronic media affect the children’s life forces that sustain the physical body.

“The sense impressions of electronic media are more than we can consume, and our body of life forces can’t take it,” he said.

A Day’s Work Undone

By the third class, the effects of media on children became

more apparent, further influencing the educational experience. “What the teacher teaches can’t stick, because of the rattled life body,” said Mr. Sblendorio. He began to notice that more and more children couldn’t remember math—they’d appear to grasp it momentarily, and then their understanding would vanish. “Everything we were doing in school became undone in the evenings when the students plugged themselves in,” he said. A new phenomenon had arisen in which children were logging onto the computer after their parents had gone to bed, staying up until the wee hours and then falling asleep in class. As the young adolescents with access to computers continued to consume and become addicted to electronic machinery, Mr. Sblendorio began to observe an extreme judgmental attitude creeping into their consciousness.

Be Here Now

In the feeling life, he witnessed a false sentimentality emerging. “The children see things performed by TV actors, accompanied by music meant to manipulate the emotions,” he said. “They seek to feel that depth of experience, too, but it’s a virtual depth of experience, not a real one.” He also observed that the constant onslaught of fast, easy, short information delivered electronically builds a habit of lack of attention. Now that electronic media is portable in many forms, including iPods and multi-function cell phones, our attention is challenged even more, making it harder to be fully present with our immediate surroundings and the people in it, rather than with an electronic device. Mr. Sblendorio has noted, too, that children’s ability to read in depth has eroded over the years, and that media negatively affects children’s social life at school in terms of how to be and cooperate with others.

An Invitation

These effects continue to be observed in children and begin to manifest at earlier ages than ever before. How can we help? Mr. Sblendorio urges us to look at how we spend our time and consider what we’re modeling for our children. He also invited us to go on a media fast, at least when the children are present. When his own children were young, Mr. Sblendorio fasted from TV and radio. The stereo occasionally played classical or folk music when the children were around—but no rock and roll, though he loves it. The computer wasn’t an issue, because he didn’t own one. “I chose to put electronic media aside when my children were little so that they could grow up in freedom,” he says—free, that is, of canned and dubious images.

“Try a media fast just to observe what happens, not even for the kids’ sake, in the end, but for yours,” he said. “Go camping or someplace where you can leave the media behind, and when you come back and push a button, do it deliberately and observe yourself.” Acknowledging once more that the media is an undeniable aspect of our world today, he said, “Ultimately, we all need to ask, How are we going to use this stuff with consciousness, care and discernment?”

Indelible History

by Tracey Brennan, Fifth-Grade Teacher

Former students I've spoken with frequently remember with affection their ancient history blocks in the fifth grade. This seems natural to me, for if fifth grade is at the heart of elementary



The inner pictures children form that reflect historical themes will enrich their soul life now and in years to come. Shown here are Main Lesson book pages from the fifth grade block on ancient cultures.

school, then the history lessons are at the heart's core. When these former students smile while speaking about the history blocks, I can tell at that moment that they are picturing something—perhaps a ziggurat under the stars, or their own drawing of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Because the inner life of a fifth grader is vivid and imaginative, and because they have opportunities to express themselves artistically, the

images formed in fifth grade can still “light up” for students many years later.

This year in our ancient history blocks the fifth graders are learning a great deal about the cultures of ancient India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Greece; but it is the soul pictures they form now that will enrich their inner life and, I hope, cause them to smile years into the future.



Mosaic

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What is Anthroposophy?

by Marilyn Ruppert, Faculty Administrator



Families who join our school community seek out a Waldorf education for their children for a variety of reasons, and they come from a wide range

of backgrounds. Most parents bring their child to our early childhood program because it has a strong reputation for being a warm, nurturing and healthy introduction to school life—or because they sensed that something valuable was taking place when they visited a classroom. Some families come because they are anthroposophists, or want a school for their child that has grown out of the work of Rudolf Steiner. Along the way, either before coming to the school or after being here, parents hear that our education is rooted in anthroposophy. What is anthroposophy, and what influence does it have on the education children receive at the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School?

For these answers we must, of course, go back to Rudolf Steiner. This extraordinary thinker and innovator developed a body of work in which he sought to synthesize his understanding of the phenomenological world of science and nature—which he had studied as a scholar and researcher—with an experiential knowledge of the spiritual world, which he had maintained and deepened since childhood. His extensive work resulted in lectures and books on a wide range of topics including medicine, agriculture, the social order, architecture, the arts and education. He also gave indications regarding spiritual practice for those interested in fostering the life of the soul. Steiner referred to his outlook as anthroposophy, that is, wisdom derived from his study of the human being.

Anthroposophy is thereby distinguished from theosophy or theology, names that connote God as the primary focus of study.

Anyone who is interested in nurturing the life of the soul, who is seeking a path from the individual to the universal, and who finds value in Rudolf Steiner's indications for this pursuit, can be an anthroposophist. This is a purely spiritual endeavor, not a religious one. Anthroposophists come from a range of religious traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity or Buddhism, or from no religious affiliation. They simply have a desire to grow spiritually and find the writings of Rudolf Steiner to be helpful. Parents make a free and individual choice as to whether or not they are drawn to taking up a closer study of Steiner's works.

A Waldorf school does not teach anthroposophy to the children. On the contrary, our goal is to educate free-thinking graduates who live according to their own integrity. As

in all of Steiner's work, our education takes into account the spiritual aspect of our students, as well as the intellectual or physical facets. This is one of the unique and extraordinary things about this form of education. Through the deeply intentional curriculum, as well as the methodology of its delivery, the spiritual dimension of the students is nurtured, most often without them even noticing. Rudolf Steiner understood that as the human being grows from birth to adulthood, he or she recapitulates the evolution of humankind. The brilliance of our education is that what is taught at each age level is not only teaching the students what they are developmentally ready to learn academically, but also is supporting their spiritual and moral development, as well. The underlying, comprehensive view of humankind that is anthroposophy is expressed in what happens every day in our classrooms. This leads one to genuinely comprehend what is meant when Waldorf education is described as being holistic or an "education for life."

GBRSS Mission

The Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School strives to lead children to a balanced development of clear and precise thinking, a rich and healthy emotional life, and a developed power of will. This will allow children to worthily apply their thoughts, feelings and actions to practical challenges in the world.

To achieve this goal each teacher works artistically with a curriculum that integrates the arts, humanities and sciences in a manner compatible with human developmental stages as explained by Rudolf Steiner. An understanding of these developmental requirements helps teachers form lessons that enliven students' imaginations and enhance their ability to establish moral relationships to the world.

A Two-Way Street: Staying Connected with our Graduates

by Janie LaBrasca, Director of Development and Alumni Relations

You only need to spend a few minutes with some of our most recent alums to be reminded of just how powerful the foundation of a Waldorf education can be. At the same time, it becomes clear how vital the rich experiences of our alums are to us as the years go by.

This past summer, I was able to sit down with five recent graduates of the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School, all of whom shared their “now that I look back” feelings, their stories of “how the Steiner School spirit lives on,” and their appreciation for “the lifelong friends we made.” This one, inquisitive adult interviewer spoke with five high-school students who possessed five totally different personalities. All are free thinkers who have gone on to be outstanding in their own ways and who have taken their grade-school lessons and experiences and applied them thoughtfully in ways that best suit their needs, dreams and aspirations.

An initially nervous conversation soon blossomed into an engaging exchange of pride and meaning. The young people shared their stories of community involvement, two serving on student government. One has found a way to act on his commitment to improving the environment, our immediate environment, by getting involved in the Monument Mountain Regional High School’s Green Team, which works on projects such as creating an organic garden to provide food for the school cafeteria. Bard College at Simon’s Rock has become the new academic world for one of the young women, while another was about to embark on the adventurous boarding school life. Guided by a trustee from our school, one of the alums is pursuing his interest in South American finance. All had traveled abroad. Whew! Now, remember, all of these students graduated from the Great Barrington



Photo caption: Recent GBRSS alums spoke with our Development Director last summer about their education and dreams. Back row: Conor Gallaher (2005), Luca Piccin (2006) and Nicholas Hernandez (2006). Front row: Isabella Goldman (08) and Leah Pittman(06)

Rudolph Steiner School within the last four years. I can only imagine what the future holds. How fortunate we are to turn out such spirited explorers, committed to acting on their dreams and to making a difference.

When reflecting back on that gorgeous summer day, I think about how much all of our graduates benefit from the unique educational experience they have enjoyed while at GBRSS and, in turn, how much each alumni leaves us with. Every class and student has left a mark, and for that we are grateful. It’s the children who fill our halls with spirit. And it is the energy of the alumni that keeps us connected.

Now that GBRSS is in its 37th year, 28 children of alums are part of our student body. Oscar Hallig, class of 1989, is our newest trustee. Many graduates keep in touch with their teachers, and teachers correspond with their former students. Parents stay connected with each other, too. The GBRSS family expands, sharing a wealth of thought and creativity with the world, while always remembering where they got their start.

It is a privilege to be director of development and alumni relations for GBRSS. Please know I will do everything in my power to honor the important, vital relationships built over the years. Reflecting this attachment to our graduates, we have begun the Alumni Scholarship Program for children of our former students. As part of this focus, a special Alumni Room was added to the Holiday Handcraft Fair this year, where alums reconnected with old friends and met new ones. Ongoing, we are updating our alumni data base and now have a dedicated page on the GBRSS website: www.rudolfsteinerschool.org. If you are an alumni of our school, let us know if you have new information or are trying to look for that old friend from way back when. Join us for Voice XI at the Mahaiwe Theater in Great Barrington, April 5th, 2009—we have discounted tickets just for you. Finally, know that as alums you are always welcome to come and visit the school, where the chairs may seem smaller, some of the faces unfamiliar, but where the spirit is just as warm, as alive and as free.

Making the Grade on Sustainability: An Interview with Mark Orlowski, GBRSS Class of 1997

Mark Orlowski is doing his part to ensure a brighter future. The nonprofit organization he founded in 2005, the Sustainable Endowments Institute, engages in research and education to advance sustainability in campus operations and endowment practices. Its “College Sustainability Report Card,” which rates colleges on their “green” practices, is attracting media attention and encouraging colleges to take a closer look at how they can maintain more environmentally friendly campuses and invest responsibly. The organization provides interactive sustainability profiles and grades for 300 schools with the largest endowments, ranging from approximately \$150 million to \$35 billion. The institutions of higher education rated include Ivy League schools, liberal arts colleges and large state universities. Here, Mosaic asks Mark about his work and how his days at GBRSS may have influenced him.

Mosaic: *How is the Report Card affecting colleges and students?*



Mark Orlowski, class of 1997.



A wind turbine generates sustainable energy on a college campus.

Mark: Making a commitment to sustainability, ranging from local food sourcing in cafeterias to renewable energy investments, is no longer a priority of only environmentalists. These types of innovations are capturing the attention of everyone, from college trustees to admissions applicants. In a poll by the Princeton Review, for example, 63 percent of more than 10,000 college applicants polled said that a college’s commitment to the environment could affect their decision. Schools can’t ignore this growing awareness.

Mosaic: *What sorts of practices does the College Sustainability Report Card rate?*

Mark: The Report Card helps schools and students compare how the different institutions measure up on issues such as food and recycling, green building, student involvement, transportation, climate change and energy, endowment transparency, investment priorities and shareholder engagement. We also show trends across policy categories. We hope that this not only helps applicants, but also allows the schools to learn from each other. For example, in the transportation category, car-sharing programs at schools

have more than doubled over the past year. This is a healthy trend.

Mosaic: *How might your experience at the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School have influenced your career path?*

Mark: I had a great eight years at Steiner, starting in first grade with Mr. Eurich. I learned at my own pace and, after eight years, still had a passion for learning and creativity—and an ability to think outside of the box. My home life also affected my sensibilities. My parents believed in environmentally friendly living and lots of natural light. At the Steiner school, too, the classrooms are inviting and filled with natural light, and there’s an appreciation for nature, with recess outside in the fields and woods. It keeps you connected. And Mr. Eurich had a multi-dimensional way of teaching that included auditory, kinesthetic and visual elements. This allowed me to get a strong grasp of the material and go on from there with confidence.

Mosaic: *Where did you attend college, and what was your focus?*

Mark: I started out at Berkshire Community College and then finished at Williams College. I ran a computer

consulting business simultaneously. After getting my associate's from BCC, I underwent an intense transfer process and was one of five students accepted to Williams out of 150 applicants. I majored in political science and environmental studies.

Mosaic: *So you must have hit the ground running when you graduated.*

Mark: I started the nonprofit organization right after graduating. At Williams, I chaired the Campus Environmental Advisory Committee and served on the Committee on Shareholder Responsibility. Through this involvement, I learned that there was no coordinated mechanism to find out what other schools were doing. The information available was anecdotal and fragmented. There was a need for a reliable, independent tracking mechanism for what was happening on campuses in New England and nationally. I am deeply involved in the research, of course, and now we have a summer research fellows program through which undergraduate and graduate students engage in research.

Mosaic: *How did you get the organization going, and how do you fund it?*

Mark: John Chandler, former president of Williams College, encouraged me to get the organization off the ground and now serves on our board of advisors. The organization is a special project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, which takes care of our accounting, legal and bookkeeping needs, and receives funding from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and a number of other foundations. I personally do all of the fundraising for the organization. One of the first seed grants we received was from

the Rudolf Steiner Foundation.

Mosaic: *What are some of the media outlets that have taken an interest in your work?*

Mark: We've received attention from the *New York Times Magazine*, CNN, *Money*, *Business Week*, *Forbes*, PBS and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, as well as from many local and campus presses. This kind of coverage is important. All too often, there's terrific research out there, but no one knows about it. It's reminiscent of an old riddle, "If you publish a great piece of research and no one knows about it, does it have an impact?" But we are having an impact, and people are interested. Since the beginning of 2007, more than 250,000 visitors have come to our website to look at research.

Mosaic: *What other activities does the organization engage in?*

Mark: We give out Champions of Sustainability in Communities Awards and Sustainability Innovator Awards to noteworthy schools. We look at things like resource efficiency or reduction of resource use, educational impact, creativity and uniqueness of solutions, and how well an approach is adaptable to other schools. These awards recognize successes and, we hope, bring attention to what progressive schools are doing so that other schools will be inspired to follow their leadership.

Mosaic: *Thank you, Mark. You're doing some valuable work in the world.*

To learn more about the Sustainable Endowments Institute, visit www.endowmentinstitute.org. More about the College Sustainability Report Card can be found at www.greenreportcard.org.

On Trust

Whatever may come, whatever the next hour, the next day may bring . . . If it is unknown to me—I am unable to change it, however much fear may prompt me. I await it with entire peace of mind, entire calm of heart.

Anxiety and fear impede our development. Through the waves of anxiety and fear we reject what wants to flow into our souls out of the future.

The acceptance of what is called divine wisdom in the events, the certainty that all that is come is necessary and that it will

have in one or the other way its positive consequences, the evocation of this mood in words, feelings and ideas—this is the mood of the prayer of acceptance.

It belongs to the attitudes which have to be learned in this our time: To live out of sheer trust without security of existence, out of trust in the ever present help of the Spiritual World.

Truly we cannot carry on differently, if our courage is not to fail.

—Rudolf Steiner

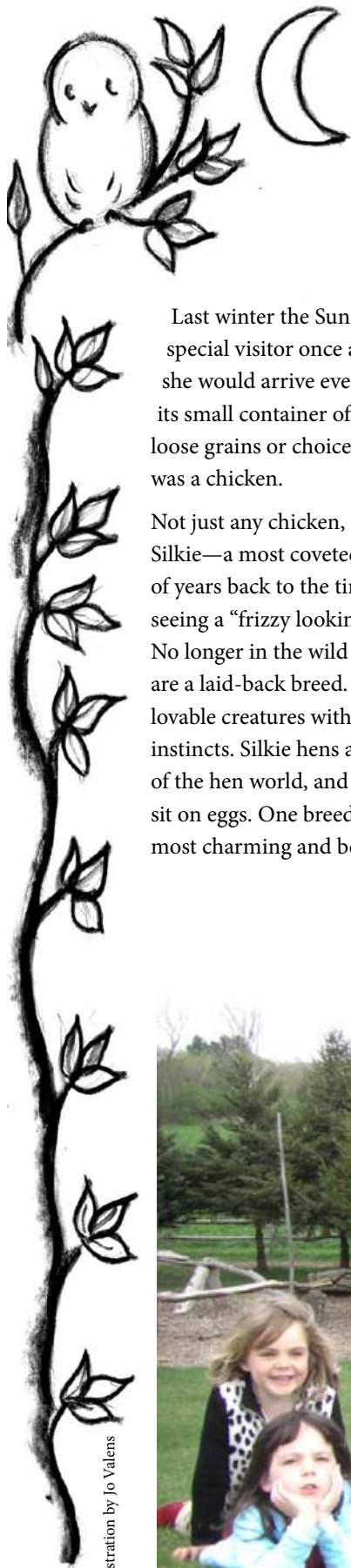


illustration by Jo Valens

A Fine Feathered Friend

by Elly Peterson, Sun Room Kindergarten Assistant

Last winter the Sun Room kindergarten began to have a special visitor once a week. Her name was Autumn, and she would arrive every Tuesday in her cozy carrier with its small container of water, some hay or newspaper, and loose grains or choice veggie pieces. For, you see, Autumn was a chicken.

Not just any chicken, mind you! Autumn was a Blue Silkie—a most coveted breed of chicken going hundreds of years back to the times of Marco Polo, who mentioned seeing a “frizzy looking bird” during his travels in Asia. No longer in the wild but found all over the world, Silkies are a laid-back breed. They are described as being cute and lovable creatures with a gentle manner and strong maternal instincts. Silkie hens are hailed as the best nesting mothers of the hen world, and even Silkie roosters are known to sit on eggs. One breeder described a Silkie bantam as “the most charming and beguiling oddity of poultry fancy.”

Autumn was of the Blue bearded variety, which is really a blue-grey color. A Silkie is aptly named, with silk-like plumage, fluffing out with a top knot or crest on the head, with abundant feathers down the legs, and five toes (instead of the usual four, making it unique in chicken circles indeed). Many owners agree that the Silkies’ calm and friendly temperament makes one lucky to be in their company. That’s just how we felt in the Sun Room.

How blessed we were to see this baby chick grow each week before our eyes into a full-grown hen who would nest two sets of hatchlings before school let out for summer. This extraordinary opportunity came our way through the Williams family, whose kindergartener, Thomas, was raising Autumn for participation in the 4H Club. Unlike chickens in a coop, Autumn was brought up having a close bond with Thomas and slept in his room every night.



Autumn the chicken (center right, with her owner, Thomas) poses with her doting Sun Room classmates.

photo by Elly Peterson

Every “soup day,” as Tuesday is known in the kindergarten, Thomas would arrive carrying Autumn in his arms like any father would, a warm blanket wrapped around her. In the beginning she was no bigger than the palm of a kindergarten child’s hand; nestled there, she was quite content. The children learned to take turns carefully holding the soft, downy white and grey chick and to take care to use quiet voices, since loud voices frightened the little bird.

Many times, though, Autumn sent ripples of laughter around the room when she would suddenly perch precariously on a child’s finger, happily chirping away. She might be the only chick ever to have sat royally inside a bowler hat and been given a ride atop a toy wooden wagon. When the children napped, Autumn did, too (most times). And when nap time was over, Thomas would bring Autumn near the ear of a sleeping child, allowing her gentle chirps to wake the child from dreamy slumber.

As the weeks progressed, Autumn’s peeps and chirps gave way to clucks, and the downy fluff was replaced with wing

feathers, leg feathers and even a tail! One day she came in with a “funny pom pom,” as one child called it, on top of her head. Autumn had grown up. Now she had her top knot and so much plumage around her eyes that we all wondered if she could see at all. The children still gazed at her with wonder, and we were the lucky ones to have the honor of sharing Autumn’s second time ever touching the earth, right on our playground. She stood still for a moment, then scratched and poked the ground as any chicken would, while the children cried, “Yeah, Autumn!”

As Autumn grew, we grew, too, with reverence, joy and love for our fine feathered friend. What a wonderful experience for us all!

Thomas and Autumn attended their first 4H event together this past summer to see what it was all about. Although they had come only to watch, the judges awarded the pair with a prize for “Outstanding Poultry Exhibitor.” Now that is something to cluck about!



Within Darkness, Light

Cultures throughout the world and throughout history have held celebrations of light during the darkest time of year. At GBRSS, our early childhood children participate in two such festivals—Lantern Walk in mid-November, and Advent Garden in early December—as the light of the outer world wanes. Both of these festivals draw on universal themes, and are imbued with a quiet, reverent mood.

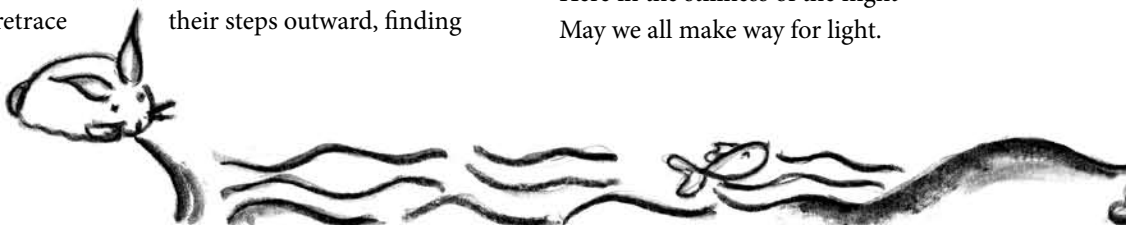
For Lantern Walk, the children, teachers, parents and siblings gather at dusk to hear a special story. Then they carry the glowing lanterns they have made into the dark night, singing songs of light while the stars shine overhead. Popcorn and warm cider lend a festive air, but the soft mood lingers. Advent Garden is held on a late Sunday afternoon in the darkened auditorium, in which a spiraling garden of evergreen boughs, flowers and crystals has been created—lit, at first, by a single candle. Each child travels through the spiral carrying his or her own candle lodged in an apple. The children—accompanied by a helping angel—light their individual candles from the pillar shining in the spiral’s center, then retrace their steps outward, finding

just the right spot, marked by a gold star, on which to place their light. Families leave the auditorium quietly, carrying the reverent mood home. During both of these festivals, the children have the experience of shining individually and in community, and of creating the beauty of light in the darkness.

The following Lantern Walk song captures the mood of these inward moments:

Here in darkness, there is light,
Even on the darkest night,
Each of us is one small light,
And together we shine bright
Here in the deepest, darkest night,
May we all make way for light.

Though the world seems cold and drear,
Still the light draws ever near
With a tiny, brilliant spark
We illuminate the dark
Here in the stillness of the night
May we all make way for light.



The Story of One

by Nancy Franco, First Grade Teacher

The First Grade number block this fall introduced the students to the quantitative, as well as qualitative, aspects of numbers. This little story I wrote for the class illustrates a qualitative aspect of the number one as the all-inclusive whole. The pedagogical aspect to the story addresses some common social issues that can arise in first grade as children learn to function as one whole class:

Once upon a time there was a prince and princess who went to school. They loved their lessons and listened well to their teachers. Soon they learned the names and sounds of all the letters and could count up to 100 and beyond! But the prince and princess had a problem with their classmates.

One day the teacher met with the King and Queen. He told them that although the royal children learned their lessons well, they still had to learn how to be friends with their classmates. You see, the prince and princess, being a prince and princess, had many wonderful things, such as beautiful clothing and many toys. Whenever another classmate wore something new, the prince and princess always reminded her that they had a closet full of beautiful things to wear. If someone brought in a toy he had received as a birthday present, the prince and princess took their classmate's happiness away by saying that they had many toys like it, some bigger and better! They brought huge snacks and lunches to school, while most of the students brought apples and carrots to eat, and they boasted of the fancy cakes and cookies they ate every day. "You can see how this causes some unhappiness in the classroom," the teacher said.

The King and Queen thought about their children's behavior. "Perhaps we've given them too many things," the Queen said.

"Yes, I believe you are right," replied the King. "I may have a solution!"



Nancy Franco's first-grade students are learning how to be part of a whole community, as well as individuals.

The next day the King and Queen called their children to them. "We have heard that you are both excellent students and enjoy learning your numbers," said the King.

The Queen reached into a bag that lay on her lap and took out six stones. "How many stones are in my hand?" she asked. "Oh mother, that is easy," the prince and princess said. "You have six!"

"Does the number six represent the number of stones in my hand?" the Queen asked.

"Yes!" they cried.

The King reached into his pocket and pulled out 10 coins. "What number represents the number of stones in my hand?" he asked. Together the prince and princess called out, "Ten!"

"Very good," said the King. "Now I have a quest for you. Find out the number that represents more things in the world than any other number, and tell me the answer in three days."

"It must be a very big number," said the prince. The princess agreed.

As they walked through the stables and barns where the royal animals lived, they

noticed how many different animals there were. "Perhaps the number represents all the animals in the world," the prince said. "Let's go ask the royal gamekeeper how many animals there are in the world."

In answer to their question, the gamekeeper said, "Oh children, there are too many to count. Here, where we live, we have horses and pigs, sheep and fowl. In the wild are beavers, foxes, deer and raccoons, to name just a few. And think of other parts of the world. Way up north live penguins and polar bears, in the hot regions live elephants, giraffes, lions and tigers. Then there are all the other creatures of the land, sea and air. Millions and millions! I cannot answer your question."

Disappointed, the royal children went home. "Tomorrow is another day," they said.

The next morning, while walking in the royal gardens, the prince said, "Perhaps the gardener knows how many plants there are in the world. That might be the number." Running to the place where the gardener was carefully tending a bed of lettuce, they asked him how many plants are in the world.

"Well, children," the gardener replied.

"If you look around, you can notice vegetables, flowers, grasses and grains. Why, in this bed alone there are five different types of lettuce! And think of all the trees! No, there are too many plants to counts—billions!"

Disappointed, the royal children returned home. "Tomorrow is another day," they said.

The next day they awoke and walked to town, pondering their father's question. As they sat on a bench to rest, they noticed how many different people passed by. Women, men and children filed by in a long parade without end. "I wonder how many people there are in the world," said the prince.

"Why, hundreds have passed by just this afternoon," said the princess. "Perhaps we should go visit the royal census taker." They ran back home and found the census taker's office.

They cried out in unison, "How many people are there in the world?"

"Well, now," said the census taker. "That is an interesting question. Do you know that there are hidden places in the world where people live who have never been

counted? And, of course, there are people of all colors, shapes and sizes. There are trillions of people! No one really knows the number."

"Oh, no," cried the prince and princess. "We do not have the answer. What shall we do?"

The next day the children awoke and went to school as usual. They were especially quiet, and their teacher and classmates noticed their gloomy faces. "Let's all play a game," said the teacher, hoping to cheer them up. The prince and princess sighed; they didn't wish to play.

As they sat quietly, they noticed for the first time how happily their classmates played without them. They spoke of their dogs and cats, their chickens and geese, their apple and plum trees, their families and neighbors. "Isn't it wonderful to live in one world that has millions and billions and trillions of things in it?" asked the teacher.

As the prince and princess walked home that day, they thought of how happy their friends were and how nice their lives seemed. They had never really listened to them before, for they had always been

busy telling their classmates about all the things they had. And the prince and princess thought about what the teacher had said about one world filled with countless things. All at once, they looked at each other, smiled, and repeated their teacher's words. With a whoop and a holler, they ran straight home to the King and Queen.

"Do you have the answer to my question?" Father asked.

"Yes!" the children replied. "The world is a wonderful place, full of lovely plants, animals, people and things. The number that represents the most things in the world is One, for One Whole World that includes so much.

"I am very proud of you, my children," said the King. "And now your gift is that tomorrow, when you return to school, you can be part of one whole class that is part of one whole world. Isn't it happier to think of ourselves as part of one world, together with all living things, rather than alone with all of our possessions?"

And, of course, it truly was.

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Get to Know Our Board of Trustees

by Kathi Weinstein, Director of Admissions

Waldorf schools are often thought of as “teacher-run” and, indeed, the faculty take on substantial responsibility when it comes to creating the classroom culture and pedagogical direction of the school. The economic realm, however, requires a different expertise, particularly in a volatile climate. Here is where our Board of Trustees, in association with core faculty and staff, takes on the primary responsibility and leadership.

Seven months after the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School opened its doors to our very first kindergarten in 1971, a crucial gift from lawyer Richard Morass was the incorporation of the school, designating it as a non-profit organization. The original board members, many of them Waldorf teachers, were Gerhard Bedding, Dolores and Tilo Kaufmann, Patti Livingston, Jane Parriot, Jean and Thorn Zay and Betty Krainis. Over the past 37 years, our trustees have seen the school through “... the best of times, and ... the worst of times...” Board members received kudos during the mid 1990s for a successful capital campaign and also worked diligently during periods of lower enrollment.

Meeting monthly from early evening to, often, late evening, our trustees investigate issues with the skill and precision of research scientists, always looking for the best possible solution for the future of our school. Much of their meeting is devoted to school management issues such as budget, policies, and legal questions.

Who are the people who take on this vital task? Since the inception of our first board, more than one hundred individuals have volunteered to act on behalf of the school in this capacity. As specified in the school’s bylaws, the board is a self-perpetuating body, determining the qualifications of its members, who typically serve a three-year term.

At the end of a term, the board solicits prospective candidates from the school community, submitting names to the nominating committee, which seeks to maintain a balanced representation of parents, teachers and friends. Qualifications sought are an ability to understand business, legal and financial issues; skill in communicating and working with others; and an appreciation of and commitment to Waldorf education and the school. After nomination, trustees are elected by affirmative vote of a majority of the board.

Our board of trustees comprises fourteen members representing parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and the community. Together, this exceptional group of individuals melds resources and expertise to provide the school with sage leadership. Working

closely with the Council of Teachers on long-range planning and development, the board oversees the budget-making process, and finalizes and approves the budget. It also oversees annual and capital fundraising and expenditures. Board committees focus on specific areas, such as development, admissions, buildings and grounds, finance, executive matters, human resources and board nominations.

The following is a brief “Who’s Who” of our current board members and their areas of expertise:

Erik Bruun, president, is parent of a kindergartener and seventh-grader, as well as of a 2008 graduate. He brings to the board his management expertise and innumerable community contacts. Erik feels that the strength of the school is the solid tradition of Waldorf education



photo by Gregory Cherin

Our energetic board of trustees works diligently to keep our school in a healthy state of balance.

provided by its experienced faculty, and for the school's future he hopes for a strong financial base and robust enrollment.

Max Dannis, vice-president and parent of a fourth-grader, owns the restaurant Local 111 in Philmont, NY, with his wife Linda Gatter. Max is also a volunteer fire fighter for the town of Claverack and is involved in landscape renovation through his business Adair.

Cathy Fracasse, treasurer and parent of a third grader, brings 20 years of experience in large and small organizations, information management and technology from her previous position working for a financial services company. Cathy serves as chair of the Finance Committee.

Jonathan Baum, secretary and parent of eighth and fifth grade students, is a lawyer and entrepreneur. In addition to his legal expertise, he brings problem-solving and communication skills to the board and the various committees on which he serves.

Heather Alston is an early childhood teacher in the Rainbow Room kindergarten. She is the mother of three children at our school, from early childhood through seventh grade, and a class of 1987 alumna of our school.

Ron Banks, father of a second-grader and kindergartener, brings both scientific training and business management skills to the board from his professions of scientist, car broker and real estate investor. Ron can be quoted as saying "It's more than a school. It's a community whose strength lies in the people."

Mary Campbell is the mother of a sixth-grader and two alums from the classes of 2006 and 2003. Her fourteen years' experience at the school in fundraising and development make her an invaluable member of the board. Mary's commitment to expansion of our early childhood programs and to the emotional and physical health of our children is carried out in her work as a trustee. She

is also founder of Claiming Our Voices, an organization that seeks to give voice to women and girls.

Gary Casarsa, the father of fourth and second-grade children, is former chair of the Advancement Committee and for the past five years has organized the school's annual golf tournament. Gary owned four successful businesses that varied in size from 2 to 500 employees, enabling him to bring to the board organizational expertise and business sense. Gary has expressed that the school's strength is its pedagogical foundation manifested through the work of the teachers, staff and parent community.

Oskar Hallig, an alumnus of the class of 1989 (Mr. Norris), has a master's degree in non-profit management. He is customer service manager of Iredale Mineral Cosmetics and teaches at Berkshire Community College. Oskar is new to the board this year, but certainly not new to the Berkshires. He has owned and operated a bed-and-breakfast, the Hallig Hilltop House, since moving back from Berlin, Germany, five years ago.

Louann Harvey, grandparent of a second-grader, is a Mortgage Officer at Berkshire Bank. In addition to her extensive knowledge of the Southern Berkshires, Louann has organized many successful fundraising events for a variety of non-profit groups she is affiliated with. New to the board this year, Louann has already acknowledged the "feeling of family" she feels in the school.

Krista Palmer has been involved with coaching and teaching physical education to our students since 1989, and completed Spatial Dynamics training in 1994. Now teaching seventh- and eighth-grade handwork, she will receive her certification in applied arts in March, 2009. She is also chair of the Council of Teachers. An alumni parent of three boys, classes of 1998, 2000 and 2002, Krista is also a Waldorf school graduate herself, having attended the Garden City Waldorf School, NY. She brings with her a superb

understanding of anthroposophy and Waldorf pedagogy.

Bernie Plishtin, father of a sixth-grader, has recently begun working for Hearst Corporation's digital media group. He is helping to evaluate, acquire, integrate and grow their internet companies, with a focus on health and wellness lifestyles. Bernie's extensive business background has made him a valued member of the board.

Marilyn Ruppert, the school's administrator, brings with her extensive administrative experience from her past positions at two prominent independent schools. She was also a Waldorf teacher at Garden City, where her two children attended pre-school through twelfth grade. Marilyn's perspective on the day-to-day functioning and health of the school are invaluable resources to the board. As a school, Marilyn says, "we are healthy, strong and inspired—and are embarking on a bright and successful future."

Rebecca McFarland is the business office manager at GBRSS and also parent to sixth- and third-grade children. Serving the board as an ex-officio member, she brings a strong commitment to managing the school's financial matters with integrity and care. Her vision for the school's future is to educate as many children as possible through strong financial support for tuition assistance.

Michael Thomas, parent of a class of 2000 graduate and the husband of early childhood teacher Jo Valens, is the chairman of the building and grounds committee. Michael has been a critical force behind the expansion of the Betty Szold Krainis Early Childhood Building, the creation of a science room in the middle school wing, and recent renovations to the office area. He brings a superb ability to conceptualize a project and rally the resources needed for its completion. In his spare time Michael is a film producer at September Films, based in New York City.

Kindergarten Soup Wisdom

by Sarah Flynn

Last year, we were a brand new family at the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School, with a Sun Room kindergartener, a first grader, and a third grader. You could say we “hit the ground running.” Before that, we had no experience whatever with Waldorf education. There have been many “Ahaa!” moments for us as we come to understand more deeply the levels on which this education speaks to our children, as well as the care with which it is offered to them here at GBRSS.

One of those moments came on a cold day in the winter, when my kindergartener was home. We decided to make our very own “soup day.” I had heard all about how the children cut the vegetables and made their own soup, and I was eager to see this in action. So we went to the fridge together, and my daughter instructed me on which vegetables to get out (beets, carrots, potatoes, and kale). Then she picked out her knife and cutting board, and sat at the table expectantly.

“Does Mrs. Kuzia give you the vegetables raw, or are they soft?” I asked. She told me they were raw and very hard. So I hesitantly handed her a raw beet. “Like this?” She took the beet, looked at it skeptically, shrugged her shoulders, and began to try to cut it with her butter knife. After the beet had shot across the kitchen a

few times, I realized there must be more to it than that. I cut the beet in half and handed it back to her. “That’s more like at school,” she said, but of course she still couldn’t cut it. When I finally cut the beet into thin strips, she beamed and said encouragingly, “Just like that!” and proceeded to cut all the vegetables for a wonderful pot of soup.

While we ate our soup, I realized a few things. The children are not doing “little child things.” They are engaged in real-life tasks, at an age-appropriate level. Mia is learning to care for herself, others, and the space we inhabit, which is the first and most basic life skill. And at a very young age, the children are learning that it is enjoyable to be competent. These are things about the school that are difficult to explain. How do you tell someone looking for reading readiness that chopping veggies is actually exactly what kindergarteners need most? I did not know that myself just a year ago!

So, many thanks to the loving early childhood teachers who carefully prepare the veggies for little ones to chop, and who reverently break bread with them on bread day. I appreciate the intention and purpose that are behind these seemingly simple gifts you give our children.

Waldorf High School Students Study U.S. Constitution

By Stephen Sagarin, Faculty Chair, Great Barrington Waldorf High School

The week before this November’s historic presidential election, Great Barrington Waldorf High School students in grades 10 through 12 began an intensive three-week seminar study of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights with Peter Elliston, history teacher and Georgetown University law school graduate.

Students read the Constitution and looked especially at the personal liberties protected by the Bill of Rights as they affect their own lives, now and in the future. Later they explored amendments to the Constitution, in particular the first amendment, as well as the branches of government and larger issues of

constitutional law. “I’ve also asked students to look at constitutions from other democracies from around the world,” said Mr. Elliston. “It’s hard to keep personal politics out of the class, but I’m trying. Students should understand all points of view.”

“It’s great,” said visitor Damian Thoenges, a junior from the Munich-Schwabing Waldorf School, one of four visitors at the school this fall. “American politics affect the rest of the world, so we all need to learn about it.”

Several high school students voted for the first time on Nov. 4. “What better time to learn about the Constitution than

in the days leading up to the election?” said senior Conor Gallagher, who hit the voting booth early on November 4 and was photographed by a local paper as the first new voter to arrive that morning. “This was a pivotal election. We’re in an economic crisis, and we need a President who can lead us out of it.”

“Not to mention the war in Iraq,” said senior Eliot Stier.

Ninth graders just completed a study of probability and statistics with Mr. Kretz, rolling dice and learning how statistics are created—and therefore how they can be used to manipulate.

Outstanding In Their Field



Richard S. Jackson Jr., Melissa Jacobs, Maureen McFarland, Tom Trifon, Elizabeth Greene, Patrice Melluzzo, Joseph Carini, Dorian Held, David Walker-Price, Dale Abrams, (not pictured: Dawn Farley, Jonathan B.Hankin, Anne Wallach)

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A Hearty Thank You to All of Our Elves and Angels

This year’s Holiday Handcraft Fair on November 15 raised more than \$36,000 for our school! This was possible because of the tremendous outpouring of parent support and creativity, and because of the generosity of our larger community who contributed to our silent auction and raffles, and who joined in the day’s festivities! Thank you, elves and angels all, for your unique handmade treasures, wonderful wares, delicious treats and smiling faces! What a perfect, “hands on” way to acknowledge support for Waldorf education—education that nurtures head, heart and hands!

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