



M o s a i c

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School

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The Seventh Grade Trip to Glen Brook, From the Student Perspective

Alexa Dannis

After a long drive, we arrived at a beautiful field and lawn with big, white buildings. We were greeted warmly by our hosts, Mark, Kate and Nate and a big fluffy Burmese Mountain dog named Moses.

We went out into the field, pitched our tents, unpacked our things, had lunch, and that's how the week began, but the rest is just a blur.

We cooked all our meals over a fire, slept in tents, canoed on two lakes and a river (which was especially awesome when we were in the rapids), and hiked Mount Monadnock in the freezing rain.

While we were there we also learned about Magellan and Columbus, two amazing explorers, and played air four-square in the barn. The only bad part was the mosquitos.

I thought this trip really brought our class closer together and helped us work together as a class.

Elinor Cherin

On Monday, the twelfth of September, Mr. Sblendorio's class of seventeen seventh graders arrived at Camp Glen Brook in New Hampshire. We were all very excited because we had heard such great things about this place. Unlike the rest of the seventh graders who had come here before us, we did not sleep in the house or do the ropes course. We slept in tents on the top of a hill and we canoed and hiked. We cooked our meals over a fire. We ate every meal out of a bowl and had compostable toilets. This was really fun because it was like living in the wilderness. It really brought our class together.

During the week we canoed two lakes and a river. The river was

everyone's favorite because it was so much fun going through the rapids. On the second to last day we hiked up a mountain. The top of the mountain was all rocks. It was cold and windy and wet and so much fun! We had a lot of trail mix which we nick-named CRAP (candy, raisins and peanuts) made by Mrs. Palmer (the games teacher at our school) and her son John, who came to Glen Brook too.



Dear Parents, Alums and Friends,

Our school strives to guide and support our children through the natural phases of development, encouraging them to grow into resourceful, warm-hearted, flexible and practical adults.

Waldorf Education acknowledges that childhood is a journey that needs appropriate time to unfold so the three soul forces - thinking, feeling and willing can mature in a healthy and organic manner.

We are all architects in this amazing process. Common striving around shared educational values is powerful and inspiring. This edition of Mosaic is a modest expression of the fact that we have chosen to place our children at the center of our community as we work toward creating social renewal.

Sincerely,

John Greene, Faculty Administrator



Mosaic

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E-mail to:
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please indicate Mosaic in the subject line

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Before There Were Books, There Were Storytellers...

by Jamie Coulter, Second-grade Teacher

Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge". Yet, in the current climate of testing and even our own desires to teach our children "well", we are missing a great opportunity to foster the growth of this vital tool, imagination, in favor of filling our children with information rather than a sense of creativity.

For most of human history wisdom was passed down orally, and while the printed word is a most useful and vital invention that has contributed so much to the spread of knowledge, we are hard-wired to hear and imagine; our brains grow and our minds expand as the spoken word falls from the lips of our teachers, parents, relatives and elders, enters our consciousness and joins us to the collective unconscious.

If we continue to rely almost exclusively on the book, as our primary means to pass on knowledge, especially for young children, we cheat them out of their human birthright, to creatively imagine for themselves the images we describe. "Noting the rapid decline of language skills over the past two generations,

child psychologists and educators are now actively championing storytelling as an ideal method of influencing a child to associate listening with pleasure, of increasing a child's attention span and retention capacity, of broadening a child's vocabulary and introducing a child to the symbolic use of language" (1.)

As children hear a story they form pictures in their minds to go along with the words, each one different. As their imaginations receive exercise, minds grow, and become more creative and flexible. A vibrant imagination is not only important for creative expression through the arts, but in understanding scientific concepts, from atoms to stars; and for interpersonal skills, imagining how someone else may feel; indeed imagination is vital in every aspect of life.

As scientists continue to unravel the profound mysteries of brain function, it seems clear that any efforts we make to keep them healthy will serve us in the long run. "Storytelling uses the left brain's functions (language, a story line, sequences of cause and effect) to speak the right brain's language of symbolic,

intuitive, imaginative truths. For example, the small bird sits on the shoulder of the boy lost in the woods and tells him how to go home. The left-brain says, "I understand the words, but birds don't speak." The right-brain says, "What did the boy say back to the bird?" It understands these impossible developments as facts. Thus, storytelling helps the brain to integrate its two sides into a whole, which promotes health and self-realization." (2)

There is a very practical reason to use story telling as the primary means of imparting knowledge. Children will imagine the troll in "The Three Billy Goats Gruff", for example, just as scary as they need to so as to get what they need from the story, no more and no less. If we show them a picture of a horrible scary troll in a book, it may give them nightmares and they will have a net loss of value. Or, if they are a little older and see a not so scary troll, the story will not have the intended impact, to show the life-saving value of quick-witted intelligence of the littlest and middle brothers in tricking the troll and the strength and protection of the biggest brother, making the world safer for us all.

These are powerful archetypes for young ones. They help children experience these ideas on a deep and profound level. They get so much more out of it than if they were simply told how great it is to be quick-witted or strong. The message gets into their psyches, not just their minds where the message could easily be misunderstood. “There is no need to be concerned that what is learned may be forgotten once school is finished. What matters is that what one teaches bears fruit and forms the character [of the child]” (3) The printed page has the potential to stand in the way of the imparting of the wisdom lessons traditional stories provide. The beauty (or lack thereof) of the artwork distracts us from the heart of the story. Of course there is a place for storybooks and art of all kinds in children’s lives, the true measure of a society is the quality and prevalence of its art. But it is of great importance that the book does not completely sublimate another art form, the art of the storyteller.

There is no need to be overly dramatic

in telling a story. Most of the stories we tell are very old, some as old as humanity itself, we can let humanity speak for itself without infusing too much of our individualism into it. “...the telling of a story is a gift.” (4) And we should present it as such, with a bit of ritual or ceremony. We tell them with reverence and respect for all those who have gone before us and for the collective unconscious to which they belong. We can tell stories with feeling and humor and warmth, but in most cases it is probably best to avoid being much more than a humble messenger of ancient wisdom.

So tell stories. Start with nursery rhymes for younger ones and stories from your childhood, stories you remember or make up or a combination. They don’t have to have a moral or even much of a plot. Have fun and connect to the children. In many ways the real purpose of stories is to connect us, that we might learn from each other and continue to improve this human condition.

Written by Second Grade Class Teacher Jamie Coulter and previously published in a parenting newsletter of the Brattleboro, VT Reformer. The Waldorf approach to Early Childhood learning incorporates storytelling in the weekly rhythm through puppet shows, spontaneous play and festivals. Puppet shows and story telling, prepared and presented by the experienced Early Childhood teachers, are also offered to the community on a regular basis.

1. Maguire, Jack, Creative Storytelling, The Philip Leaf Group, New York, 1985
2. Gere, Jeff, By Word of Mouth: Storytelling Tools for the Classroom, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, www.prel.org/products/pr_/storytelling.htm
3. Steiner, Rudolph, The Education of the Child, Anthroposophic Press, Hudson, NY 1996
4. MacDonald, Margaret Read, The Storyteller’s Start-Up Book, August House, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1993

Will Saint Nicholas Visit Your Home?

Yes, Saint Nicholas is often celebrated in Waldorf Schools and within the Waldorf Home. Saint Nicholas Day is widely celebrated all over Europe, his feast day is December 6, which falls early in the Advent season. In some parts of the world he arrives in the middle of November and moves about the countryside, visiting schools and homes to find out if children have been “good.”



Saint Nicholas was born in either Syria or Turkey in 3 A.D. and eventually became the Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor. There are many stories about Saint Nicholas – some involve the provision of a dowry for three daughters, some involve Saint Nicholas bringing food to the starving, some involve calming the seas. He is the Patron Saint of prisoners (Saint Nicholas was persecuted for his faith and spent time in prison), children, sailors and is the Patron Saint of Russia.

Where St. Nicholas is prominent, his day is the primary gift giving day. Children typically leave out a clean shoe (or wooden clogs from Germany) for receiving gifts along with hay and carrots for the horse of Saint Nicholas. Usually in return the children receive nuts, candy, chocolates. This is a holiday that leads us deeper into Advent, and is one of great joy.

About “Tomba” ~ a Bilingual Story for Tender Hearts and Adventurous Gnomes

Kirsten Suberg’s first book “Tomba,” the sweet tale of gnome Tomba and his journey to attend a royal marriage, is part of her Master’s Thesis. The idea “came easily to her” while at Sunbridge College, its primary purpose being to aid in the teaching of foreign languages. But publishers and young readers agree that it is a very entertaining story of a gnome, a royal wedding and a small star with big love. Kirsten says, “My inspiration was my teaching background and my training at Sunbridge.”

Kirsten Suberg was born and raised in Northern Germany, graduating from the Freie Waldorf Schule in Oldenburg. While spending a year in the United States during high school, Kirsten deepened her love for foreign languages. As an adult she returned to the United States, earning her degree in linguistics, and graduating from Sunbridge with a Master’s in Education. She has taught German at the Waldorf Saratoga Steiner School for grades 1-12 and had a class at the Lake Champlain Waldorf School. Kirsten is now the GBRSS Third Grade Class Teacher.

Kirsten comments, “I asked Nancy Franco [to illustrate]

because she is such a great artist.” Kirsten has always admired Nancy’s artwork, from her beautiful, colorful and detailed “Steiner blackboard art” to original oil paintings. Nancy, who was born and raised on Long Island, has lived out of the country for many years like Kirsten. She was in Canada for 25 years and received her teacher training there before returning to the United States. She has been illustrating children’s books for 25 years and is the GBRSS Fourth Grade Class Teacher.

“Tomba” is written in English and German using sentence structures and vocabulary that make it useful to teach either language. It is “reversible” in that it can be used to teach English to German speakers and vice versa. Currently there are few books that can be used in foreign language teaching in this way. Kirsten suggests that it can be translated to Spanish and French, for example, in the future. Kirsten brought her young daughter into the writing process and shared the first published copy with her Lake Champlain and GBRSS students, a special moment for each group. She is not sure when the next book will come to be, but this one is available for purchase at many locations.



Excerpt from Tomba, by Kirsten Suberg ©2011



Illustration from Tomba, by Nancy Franco ©2011

Eurythmy Unveiled ~

Understanding a Subject Unique to Waldorf Education

By Thomas Poplawski

Waldorf eighth-graders typically go through a “Question Authority!” stage. They berate their teachers with questions such as: “Why do we have to study German? I am never going to Germany.” and “What’s the use of algebra? It is never going to help me in real life.”

The strongest reaction, however, is often reserved for the subject of eurythmy. This is not surprising. The eighth-grader, entering adolescence, is going through a growth spurt and the process of sexual maturation. These often result in physical awkwardness, even clumsiness, as well as extreme self-consciousness and emotional vulnerability. At this point, eurythmy asks the student to move in a graceful and controlled way and to express sensitively the often tender feelings of a poem or piece of music in front of critical peers. The resulting howls of protest often lead Waldorf schools to reduce eurythmy in grade eight to occasional blocks or to abandon it entirely for the year.

Problems with eurythmy also occur in earlier grades. Younger students also can find it discomfiting and their parents may find this very distinct art of movement mystifying. Hence a closer look at eurythmy, its history, its place within the Waldorf curriculum is in order.

Origin of Eurythmy

In the early part of the last century, Rudolf Steiner, was active as a spiritual teacher. Leader of the German branch of the Theosophical Society, Steiner was interested in developing the arts as a means of personal and spiritual development. He wrote and directed plays and also commented on the drama and dance of the day. Steiner wanted to bring a



new impulse to the art of movement, an alternative to “modern dance” in Europe developing at that time, with its emphasis on personal self-expression. Steiner’s wanted to connect dance with its original impulse as a sacred art form inspired by the Muses. However, rather than looking back and recreating the temple dances of ancient times, as Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis strove to do, Steiner wanted to bring an art of movement suited to the needs and mentality of modern humanity.

In 1912, Steiner was approached by a

woman whose teenage daughter was interested in dance. The woman asked Steiner if there were a type of dance which had a true spiritual dimension. Steiner replied in the affirmative and soon, working with Marie von Sievers, an actress who later became his wife, began to instruct young Lori Schmidt in the art of eurythmy.

Eurythmy was at first a stage art used to enhance the performances of the “mystery plays” which Steiner had written. When the first Waldorf school was founded in 1919, Steiner felt strongly that

eurythmy, in a modified version, should be part of the curriculum. He once said that eurythmy and gardening are two absolute essentials in a true Waldorf school.

Visible Speech

As an art of movement, eurythmy is perhaps unique in that it accompanies speech as well as music. Eurythmy seeks to make speech visible. Primarily with gestures of the arm and hands movements—though also with the feet and the entire body—the eurythmist manifests the individual sounds of speech.

The movements in ballet and other forms of dance are the inventions of human beings. According to Steiner, the eurythmic gestures for the vowel and consonant sounds are not arbitrary nor accidental but inherent in nature. They reflect the way the larynx moves in shaping the current of breath so that one or another sound is produced. There are remarkable stop-action photos which show the larynx doing exactly this. Eurythmy thus shows in three-dimensional movement the key expressive sounds of a verse or poem. This is done in an artistic fashion, so that the beat, the meter, the stresses, and the pauses are also made visible.

Visible Music

In modern dance the movements accompany the music and the dancer seeks to portray his own response to and particular interpretation of the piece. Eurythmy done to music—tone eurythmy—seeks to make the music manifest in a more objective way. It makes visible the several elements of the music according to certain fixed principles set forth by Steiner and von Sievers. Particular movements of the arms and hands show the pitch, the intervals between the notes, and major and minor modes, and even individual chords and notes. The meandering of the melody

and its stresses are usually expressed in the form being moved. The feet can emphasize staccato notes or other aspects of rhythm. Individual eurythmists will present the same piece in different ways, but each will aim to manifest the intrinsic elements of the music rather than his or her own feelings about or reaction to it.

An Elevated Art

Eurythmy as an art of movement seeks to develop the higher and refined aspects of the human being rather than to express more instinctual impulses. One can consider eurythmy in terms of the hierarchy of the seven chakras or energy centers in the human body. Ballet and other forms of modern dance are centered in the solar plexus or third chakra. The martial arts including tai chi use a lower center, three inches below the navel termed the tan tien (meaning the cinnabar or red field). The focus of some forms of popular contemporary dance is the bottom or sexual chakra. The center of movement for Eurythmy is at the level of the collarbone. This elevated center along with Eurythmy's emphasis on upper body and arm movements draws the focus upward and away from the physical and mundane and from the usual realm of everyday consciousness. The eurythmist seems to float across the stage with grace and dignity without the acrobatic movements typical of other forms of dance.

In modern dance, the performers wear tight-fitting costumes that accentuate and draw attention to physical and even the sexual aspect of the human being. In contrast, eurythmists wear loose fitting, flowing gowns that emphasize the higher, soul-spiritual dimension of the human being. This is appropriate for an art of movement that is an experiment in rediscovering the sacred in artistic movement.

An Art of the Etheric

All forms of movement work to some extent with the life-forces of the human being. Rudolf Steiner termed these “etheric” or “life-formative” forces, invisible energies that give form and function to the physical body. In the Asian martial and healing arts, the term “chi” or “ki” refers to these same forces. Traditional Asian dance and drama have been based on an understanding of these etheric forces for millennia. Eurythmy is perhaps the only modern Western approach to dance that works with the etheric forces in a conscious and systematic way. This connection to the invisible dimension of reality gives to eurythmy its beauty as a performing art. It also allows eurythmy to be used as a healing or therapeutic modality. In so called “therapeutic eurythmy” the art is using to treat physical, psychological, and other disorders.

Eurythmy takes a spoken work and amplifies it, making its images and insights more clear and more deeply experienced. It does the same with a musical piece. As a performance art, it seeks to elevate and refine both the performer and the onlooker. Psychologists have discovered an interesting phenomenon that occurs strongly in children but in adults as well. When we observe another person moving, engaged in a sport, or dancing, or even just skipping along, we replicate that movement within ourselves. Neurologists have recently attributed this phenomenon to what they have termed “mirror neurons” in which we inwardly mirror intentional movement outside of us. In Waldorf circles we speak of how our own etheric body copies the movements of those we are watching. Thus if we see someone fall or move in a discomfited way we inwardly, empathetically, have the same experience. When a eurythmist artistically makes a poem visible, the onlooker is replicating those movements and feelings within himself. By

manifesting the sound and meaning of the poem, the eurythmist allows the viewer to experience the work of art deeply in body and soul.

Eurythmy and the Child

Rhythm lies at the core of eurythmy and the study of eurythmy helps the child understand and experience in a positive way this basic component of life. Rhythm is not just an insistent musical beat, rhythm is a predictable harmonious recurring pattern that is a signature of life and health. Harmonious rhythm plays an important role in both the growth of the child and the development of good health. It is a key factor in Waldorf education. Rhythm is used to support learning and emotional balance, especially in the hands-on or “will” classes such as handwork, sculpture, form-drawing, and also eurythmy. These classes all involve physical movement and in them the child learns to work and move in a balanced and rhythmic way.

In eurythmy class, the children work with the rhythms present in great poetry and music. The children step according to the meter of a poem, perhaps the anapest of the trotting horse (short – short – long) or the sad trochee of the wounded warrior (long-short – short). When doing eurythmy to a musical piece they will take a strong step on the stressed note, even if it be only an eighth note, to accentuate it. Meanwhile, the movement of the arms may reflect the movement of the pitches of the melody. The form or pattern that one moves in Eurythmy reflects the rhythm of the line of verse or the beat of the musical piece.

Working with rhythm in eurythmy and in the other subject, helps the child fully and properly incarnate into his physical body. The ability to move gracefully and with a good sense of rhythm indicates that there is a resonance between the soul-spiritual

being of the child and the physical body. Doing eurythmy allows the child to experience with her entire body the building blocks of language and of music. The children learn the physical and etheric gestures for all the consonants and vowel, for the notes of the musical octave, and for other musical elements. The intense experience of speech and music through eurythmy also refines the child in body and soul. Playing a musical instrument has a similar effect but in Eurythmy, the child’s body is the instrument, and thus the experience is much more powerful. Through eurythmy, the child can experience a poem of Keats or Robert Frost with her whole physical and soul spiritual being not only her intellectual understanding. She can internalize the music of Mozart, imprinting its harmony and beauty into her character and soul. Thus the student can move toward that goal, central to Waldorf Education, the realization of her humanity in its highest form.

Neurology might speak of eurythmy creating a rich network of synaptic connections and psychology might praise the engagement and development of the multiple intelligences. Eurythmy can also be described as allowing the child to deeply experience the greatest impulses of our civilization, though this experience is completed only if the child continues eurythmy through the Waldorf high school years.

Pedagogical or school Eurythmy is also used to develop specific mental abilities. In eurythmy class the children walk to counting “concentration exercises”. In one such exercise the child may step four beats but take a backward step on one of those beats. In each series, the backward step is on a different beat, i.e. on beat 1 the first series, then beat 2 the next series, then 3 and then 4 and then back to 1. After learning the sequence, it can be sped up, then groups of children next to

each other can do it in tandem and so on with variations. Mastering these exercises requires tremendous focus so as not to be distracted by others.

An important part of eurythmy in the schools is the visualization and the movement of geometric forms. This is a spiritual practice known from ancient times in many different cultures around the world. In Eurythmy, the children move in invisible, inwardly visualized circles, squares, triangles, and five-, six-, and seven-pointed stars. Moving these shapes not only helps the children in their study of geometry, but also serves with centering and mental concentration. When done together with copper rod exercises, these exercises develop the child physical and emotional posture or “uprightness.”

Eurythmy as a Social Art

From kindergarten on, children in a Waldorf school learn through eurythmy to move together with others. Because most of the eurythmy work takes place in a circle, the child learns that she can only move right or left if she waits for her neighbor to move. She learns to move into the circle together with her neighbors and to take them with her as she moves outward again. As the eurythmy curriculum becomes more complex through the years, she learns to move around seven-pointed stars and other complicated patterns, always with “the other” in mind, progressively more in harmony with the movements of her fellow students. The students develop a sense of where they are in space and how they relate to others. And they learn to move as part of a group. Many Waldorf schools, despite their relatively small number of students, field surprisingly successful basketball teams. This success may be attributable to the students ability to move harmoniously in a group, an ability that the girls and boys have developed in Eurythmy class.

Each of the arts helps the children develop in various ways. Eurythmy deepens the children's experience of great poetry and music. It helps them acquire an inner and outer grace, an aesthetic sensibility, and a feeling for social harmony. Eurythmy's work with rhythm and geometry can aid the children in their study of mathematics and in developing good focus and improved concentration. An eighth-grader may find this all hard to grasp, but perhaps they will when they are older.

Thomas Poplawski, staff writer for Renewal, is a psychotherapist, trained eurythmist and father of two sons who attend Hartsbrook School in Hadley, Massachusetts. His wife, Valerie, is a kindergarten teacher at the school. Thomas is the author of Eurythmy, Rhythm, Dance and Soul and Completing the Circle, a collection of articles on parenting and education.



GBRSS Eurythmy teacher Susan Elmore grew up in northwestern Connecticut and attended Oberlin College, Ohio, and the Waldorf Institute of Mercy College, Michigan. For over thirty years she has been involved full-time in eurythmy. Since earning her four year diploma at the London School of Eurythmy in 1979, she has taught all ages of children and adults, become certified in eurythmy therapy, and pursued further training in theater arts. Susan has performed in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.



Many, many, thanks
to all friends,
parents, children,
staff and merchants.

The Fair was Fabulous!

Mission Statement

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.

A Summer Trek through the English Countryside

By Nancy Franco, photos by Krista Palmer

Summer is the time for teachers to rest, recharge, and prepare for the following year. Some parents might ask, “How do teachers do that?” Of course the answer is as varied as each individual teacher.

This past summer, Ms. Franco and Mrs. Palmer chose to slow down time, stay fit, and nurture themselves through beauty, art, and architecture. Both teachers are happy to report this tall order was fully met.

In mid-July our two adventuresome teachers began a 140 mile walk through the English countryside on a trail called the North Downs Way. They each carried a backpack containing a few items of clothing, an extra pair of shoes, one water bottle, and a growing number of souvenirs. They meandered through green rolling hills, old woodlands, manor estates, and fields of golden barley. They discovered charming thatch and timber villages, beautiful galleries, castles, shady church yards, and cathedrals.

A lot of food can be consumed when walking 15 miles a day! When recounting the trip they are quick to mention Kent cream teas, Yorkshire pudding, and ale pies from the local village pub.

Their last days in England were spent walking along the white cliffs of Dover, smelling the salt air, listening to the gulls, and basking in the sun. They watched the cliffs grow smaller as their ferry crossed the English Channel, and said a fond farewell to England on their way to the next destination; Paris. *Tres magnifique!*

Nancy Franco is a class teacher and an illustrator/ author. Her current students are in their Fourth Grade year.

Krista Palmer teaches Physical Education, Handwork and is Athletic Director, Coach and Teacher Council Chair. She has been at GBRSS since 1994 and is a graduate of Garden City Waldorf School.



Us by a sign for the trail – let the hiking begin!



Canterbury Cathedral is majestic and humbling



Rows of well kept apple trees



Our view of the White Cliffs of Dover - stunning



The Green Down with villages and towns below



Mornings at Matrushka

All are Welcome

Puppet shows and story hours given by the early childhood teachers of the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School

January 14, February 11, and March 10
two shows on each date at 10:30 and 11:30am

Matrushka Toys and Gifts
309 Main Street, Great Barrington



Friends and family are invited to monthly

Open House Teas

Enjoy tea and muffins in the school library and meet school administrators. During a walking tour of school buildings and grounds, visitors step into Elementary and Middle School classrooms to experience Main Lesson, hand work and wood working studios, and visit Early Childhood classes. Visitors may participate in aspects of the curricula, such as watercolor painting, beeswax modeling or form drawing.

Open House Teas take place
from **9 to 11am**

Dec. 13, Jan. 10, Feb. 14, Mar. 13, Apr. 10 and May 8

Reservations are requested **413-528-4015**



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