

May 2006

# Philomath Montessori School Newsletter



*For the Families and Friends of the Philomath  
Montessori School*

## Classroom News

Once again, the end of the school year is nearing and I am writing my last article for the last newsletter of the 2005-2006 school year. The year has gone by so quickly. But I guess that is a common perception when you live with young children. Time passes quickly. The years go by in a twinkling. And sooner than you would believe, it's time to say good-bye.

We've done such an awful lot of work since I last wrote! Our Armenia unit is finished and we are now learning about Costa Rica. The big holiday we celebrated in conjunction with Armenia was Women's Day so Pauline and I took turns telling stories about women, both famous and not-so-famous that we admire. Children really love a story that is told and not read. I need to do more of it. As we study Costa Rica, we will celebrate World Environment Day. The kids do care so deeply about the world of nature that it will come naturally for them to recognize the meaning of this day. They love the various animals of the seven continents and the animals and plants that dwell in certain biomes. They know their names, very often. They can tell you, sometimes, what family or class they belong to. They can name some of their specialized body parts and what characteristics they have in common with other mollusks or insects or mammals. They may know whether the plant is flowering or non-flowering,

deciduous or evergreen, etc. This knowledge leads them to a truly deep and meaningful level of love and caring that they may well carry with them into adulthood. It is said that we can love only that which we know. And so it is that when a child learns names and facts about a creature that interests him, this is fodder for the child's very growth and development. It may come to pass that the child's love and caring that they developed at this young age may one day serve to preserve these very species.

As we study Costa Rica, we will do art and practical life activities using sea shells as that country is known for its beautiful beaches. We will trace letters and numbers in the sand tray, as well. We would like to serve a lot of different tropical fruits at snack as well as beans and tortillas. We will emphasize animals of the tropical forest and the ocean. Costa Rica has several peninsulas and gulfs that are easy to see on a map and the entire section of Central America is one large isthmus! We will study volcanoes, learning the types and parts of them as Costa Rica has several active volcanoes. We will also learn about some different species of turtles and what their body parts are called as there is very important and protected turtle habitat along those beaches. We'll learn about frogs, too. We plan to re-create Costa Rican molas which are traditionally scenes pieced together out of fabric. Our very talented tailors and seamstresses can try their hand at sewing them and our younger folks can glue one together for a similar effect. We have a few other tricks up our sleeves for this cultural unit and may I remind you that many of your kids already

participate in the Costa Rican national sport, futbol!

At this time of year, we like to introduce a number of science activities into the environment. These are usually not done only once as a way of demonstrating a principle of physics, but presented individually, with key vocabulary given so that the child can take it from the shelf and do it again and again until satisfied. Each time she does it, her understanding of what is shown becomes deeper and more integrated in her intelligence. We have planned to present Sinking and Floating, Magnetic and Non-magnetic, Likes repel and Opposites attract, Compass making and Light refraction. In the realm of nature study we have some outdoor group activities planned for the full day. We will do one activity all together in which we will grow crystals and monitor their progress. Many of these activities are also opportunities for movement and practical life skill as well as vocabulary enrichment. And they're fun!

There are some other new developments in our classroom that were covered at our last Parent's Meeting of the year, so for those, please refer to your minutes.

Thank you, everyone, for a wonderful school year. I am so impressed with your commitment to a truly special early childhood education. I am deeply humbled by your volunteerism and I have enjoyed myself in your company and in the company of your kids. I hope everyone gathers up wonderful memories this summer full of dappled shade, the smell of freshly cut grass, the sound of crickets and the taste of ice cream.

doni

### My New Hero

While many of us feel overwhelmed by all the injustice and suffering around the world, Cassidy Donaldson, a 7-year-old, is undaunted. She knows that she is making a very real and sustaining difference in the lives of children in Sudan. Two little chapters came together to make the story.

Preparing for the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration this year that the Corvallis Montessori School puts on at the Majestic, Cassidy learned about slavery and later that slavery continues today. Very moved by this, she and her friends decided to start a Stop Slavery Club. Serious about learning more about slavery today, she and her mom found a site about slavery in Sudan, a place she remembered from her map work at PhMS. Though her friends joked about going to Sudan to rescue the children, Cassidy persisted in trying to find a real way to help. Searching for something apolitical and tangible, her mom, Kathy discovered Kids for Kids -- a British charity that helps kids help themselves. From their gift list, you can buy a goat for a child -- a vital asset in Darfur. Their milk can be life-sustaining and these goats will produce goats that go to other family members. First, Cassidy started going around telling others about the plight of children in Sudan to raise funds to buy goats. After awhile she began to feel uneasy about just asking for money...so another idea was born.

While visiting Soft Star Shoes, one of the seamstresses remarked that her cat really liked to play with the fur and scraps lying around the shop. Cassidy was given some scrap leather and fur if she promised to make something with it. Taking on her task with earnest, she came up the Playful Pancakes design -- a beautiful and engaging leather toy for cats. It takes her 45 minutes to make one and she now sells them online through Soft Stars Shoes, and gives all of the money to Kids for Kids. To date, she has made, with the help of her friends (Aurora, Meaghan, and Morgan), enough Playful Pancakes to raise over \$1000 -- enough to purchase almost 50 goats! You can go to [www.softstarshoes.com](http://www.softstarshoes.com) to find out more. There you'll also find links to Kid for Kids.



Cassidy, Morgan, and Meaghan are assembling Playful Pancake cat toys.

## Nature

*When children come into contact with nature, they reveal their strength.*

-Maria Montessori

*When I see birches bend to left and right . . .  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.*

-Robert Frost

If, when we were young, we tramped through San Diego's chaparral canyons, or raised pigeons on a rooftop in Queens, or fished for Ozark bluegills, or felt the swell of a wave that traveled a thousand miles before lifting our boat, then we were bound to the natural world and remain so today. Nature still informs our years – lifts us, carries us.

As a boy, I spend hours exploring the woods and farmland at the suburban edge of Kansas City. Within the windbreaks were trees that we could shinny, the smaller branches like the rungs of a ladder. We climbed far above the fields, and from that vantage looked out upon the old blue ridges of Missouri, and the roofs of new houses in the ever-encroaching suburbs.

Often, I climbed alone, imagining myself as Rudyard Kipling's Mowgli, the boy raised by wolves. If I climbed high enough, the branches thinned to the point where, when the wind came, the world would tip down and up and around and up and to the side and up. It was frightening and wonderful to surrender to the wind's power.

Now, my tree-climbing days long behind me. I often think about the lasting value of those early, deliciously idle days. I have come to appreciate the long view afforded by those treetops. The woods were my Ritalin. Nature calmed me, focused me, and yet excited my senses.

Member of my generation grew into adulthood taking nature's childhood gifts for granted; we assumed when we thought of it at all) that generations to come would also receive these blessings. But now we know that something has changed.

Over the past fifteen years, I have interviewed families across the country about the changes in their lives, including their relationship with nature. With few exceptions, even in rural areas, parents say the same thing: Most children aren't playing outside anymore, not in the woods or the fields or the canyons. Today, kids are well

aware of the global threats to the environment, but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature on a day-to-day basis is fading.

A fifth-grader in a San Diego classroom put it succinctly: "I like to play indoors better 'cause that's where all the electrical outlets are."

I believe our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature. That unintended message is delivered in school, families, even organizations devoted to the outdoors, and codified into the legal and regulatory structures of many of our communities – effectively banning much of the kind of play that we enjoyed as children. Our institutions, urban/suburban design, and cultural attitudes unconsciously associate nature with doom, while disassociating the outdoors from joy and solitude. Well-meaning public-school systems, media, and parents are scaring children straight out of the woods and fields.

Many parents are aware of the change, and they sense its importance. When asked, they cite a number of everyday reasons why their children spend less time in nature than they themselves did, including disappearing access to natural areas, competition from television and computers, dangerous traffic, more homework and other time pressures. Most of all, parents cite fear of stranger danger, as round-the clock news coverage conditions them to believe in an epidemic of child-snatchings, despite evidence that the number has been falling for years.

As a result, children's worlds, limitless in cyberspace, are shrinking in reality. A 1991 study of three generations of nine-year-olds found that by 1990, the radius around the home where children were allowed to roam on their own had shrunk to a ninth of what it had been in 1970. This year, "Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18 Year Olds," conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, revealed that kids' average weekly electronic media exposure is almost sixty hours, more time than most parents spend on full-time jobs. And the UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families reports that during the week, parents and children are in constant motion, racing between school, games, shopping, work – and American kids spend virtually no time in their own yards. Such lives leave little time for unstructured activities in nature.

As the nature deficit grows, new studies demonstrate just how important direct contact with the outdoors is to healthy human development. Some of the most intriguing research has been inspired by Harvard University scientist and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Edward O. Wilson's "biophilia" hypothesis. Wilson

defines biophilia as “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life.” He and his colleagues argue that humans have an innate affinity for the natural world, probably a biologically based need integral to our development as individuals.

In short, we need experience in nature more than we know.

Most of the new evidence that connects nature to well-being and restoration has focused on adults, but during the past decade, scientists have begun to study the impact of nearby nature on child development. Environmental psychologists reported in 2003 that nature in or around the home, or simply a room with a view of a natural landscape, helped protect the psychological well-being of the children.

Researchers have found that children with disabilities gain enhanced body image and positive behavior changes through direct interaction with nature. Studies of outdoor-education programs geared toward troubled youth-especially those diagnosed with mental-healthy problems-show a clear therapeutic value. Some of the most intriguing studies are being done by the Human-Environment Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois, where researchers have discovered that children as young as five showed a significant reduction in the symptoms of Attention-Deficit Disorder when they engaged with nature. Could nature therapy be a new option for ADD treatment?

Meanwhile, the California-based State Education and Environmental Roundtable, a national effort to study environment-based education, shows what Montessori teachers have known all along: Schools that use outdoor classrooms, among other techniques, produce student gains in social studies, science, language arts, and math; improved test scores and grade-point averages; and enhanced skills in problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making. Additional evidence suggests that time in natural surroundings stimulates children’s creativity.

People who care about children and the future of the environment need to know about such research, but for the most part, they do not. Today we see dramatic increases in childhood obesity, attention difficulties, and depression. When these issues are discussed at the conference table or the kitchen table, direct childhood experience in nature is seldom mentioned. Yet, the growing nature deficit experienced by today’s children, and potentially for generations to come, may be the most important common denominator.

I am not suggesting that we bring back the free-range childhood of the 1950s. Those days are over. But, with a deeper understanding of the importance of nature play to healthy child development, and to their sense of connection to the world, we can create safe zones for nature exploration. We can preserve the open space in our cities, and even design and build new kinds of communities, using the principles of green urbanism. We can weave nature therapy into our healthy-care system, and nature experiences into our classrooms, as Maria Montessori called us to do long ago.

We can launch and support a No Child Left Inside movement.

And we can challenge environmental organizations to take this issue seriously. For if the disconnection between children and nature continues, who will become the future stewards of the earth – and who will swing on birches?

Richard Louv is a futurist and journalist focused on family, nature, and community. He is the author of seven books, including, most recently, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Algonquin). Among his other books are *Childhood’s Future* (Anchor), *The Web of Life* (Conari), *Fly-Fishing for Sharks: An Angler’s Journey Across America* (Simon & Schuster), and *America II* (Houghton Mifflin). He is a columnist for the *The San Diego Union-Tribune* and has written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and other newspapers and magazines. He also served as a columnist and member of the editorial advisory board for *Parents* magazine, and as a commentator on *Monitor Radio*.



Sara and Allyson stop to have a snack together.

## Thank Yous – Spring 06

Coming to the close of the year, we can all enjoy the satisfaction of many wonderful accomplishments and the stars are all of you – the parent and grandparent volunteers. We hope that you know and understand how much we appreciate and value all that you do.

Our classroom received help from **Alissa** who prepared sew cards, **Keith** furnished clay AND also fired clay pots made in the classroom, **Michele** prepared burlap sewing squares, **Melissa** cut paper circles for our planet activity, **Maren and Melissa** both typed parent articles, **Jin** prepared paper for the cutting activity, and **Tessa** laminated and trimmed our new land and water form cards of the world.

**Jin and Leo** brought in a beautiful cyclamen plant at the end of winter and it's still blooming. **Michele** saw how much fabric cutting we do and gifted us with a new rotary cutter and a square for measuring! For their birthdays, **Anya Mae** gave our class a favorite book [A Tree is Nice](#) and **Dylan** enriched our science library with the books [Ferns](#), [Taking Root](#), and [Living in the Tundra](#). Thank you!

We had lots of visitors at our Open House thanks to **Jessica Neebe, Kay, Jin, Dodie, Maren, and Doni** posting our Open House flyers around Philomath and Corvallis. Our classroom shelves and materials stay dusted and clean thanks to **Kristen**. She made a special trip in for our Open House while **Melissa and Tessa** transformed our backyard by mowing, trimming, and weeding (whew!). **Melissa, Harrison, Jessica, Aurora, Shaden, Jin, Leo, John, and Maren** gave up some valuable Saturday time to come in and help us host the Open House. Thank you very much!

Thank you, **John** for taking down the Open House banner. **John** asked if he could help when he saw the banner still up worried that someone might think we had another open house coming up. I couldn't untie Allan's knots – I didn't think to ask one of you!

I am very grateful for all the work that **Scott Ramsey, Kathy Donaldson, Jessica Neebe, and Tessa Hanover** have been doing for the College of Philomath Community Corporation (CPCC) and the Philomath Area Senior Citizen Association (PASCA). Kudos to **Jessica and Tessa** for taking on the big task of organizing a great Bell Tower crowning celebration with short notice and little financial support. **Kathy, Jessica,** and I just got our first (for the 3 of us) PASCA newsletter out this week (with

**Kathy** pulling the big jobs)! They've also been working with me on CPCC's Public Involvement committee. Our first big event is the United Way Day of Caring on Friday, May 12. Hope you can join us!!

**Jessica Neebe** has also agreed to another job for our school – take minutes for our board meetings. Thank you, **Jessica!!**

Many thanks to **Kristi McClaren, Carol Hultstrunk, and Jessica Neebe** for attending the Waldorf auction fundraiser to garner ideas for our next auction.

A very big thank you to **Ed and Kay Bomber** for all their hard work and dedication to the Love of Learning Road Race. It is such a fun family event that it was a difficult decision to cancel the race this year. However, when **Meredith Howell**, one of our board members, came up with a fundraiser that demanded only one day of work, Kay and I agreed that it made more sense and heaved a sigh of relief. Already though, parents are wondering what will we do to replace the Kid's Race. And what about T-shirts?! Thank you **Rob, Dodie, and John** for attending an organizational race meeting in March on the heels of the auction fundraiser! I am awed by everyone's energy and enthusiasm.

Thank you to all our **coop shoppers** who have been saying our name at the cash register. The **First Alternative** sent us a check for \$78.43 last week for the quarter. The highest yet!

**Thank you, everyone, for all that you do!**



**Clare and Celine draw a biome map of North America together.**

## Newsline Spring 2006

- On Thursday, May 11, there will be another **Children's Open House** from 5:00 - 6:30 - a special evening for the children and another rare opportunity to be in the classroom with your child!
- We are planning a **parent meeting and discussion** on Thursday, May 18 from 6:30-8:00. Come join us as we wrap up the year and share with you what we garnered from our Seattle conference! Free child care provided.
- There will be **no school** on Monday, May 29 -- Memorial Day.
- Thursday, June 1 is the **deadline** for tuition deposit updates, registration fees, and tuition.
- Please gather with us for our **End-of-Year Potluck** will be on Saturday, June 3 from 5:00 - 6:30 in our school backyard or in the classroom, if the weather is inclement. Hope you can make it!
- If you would like to keep you current **year-round job** for the 2006-07 school year, please let us know.
- The **last day of school** will be Thursday, June 8. There will be **no extended day**.



## Upcoming Event



The spring **United Way Day of Caring work party** is happening this Friday, May 12 at the College of Philomath building (our future site!) from 8:30 - 11:30. We will be doing some light landscaping and spring cleaning. **Dave Alba** will be hosting a **Children's Day of Caring** same time, same place. Come join the fun and bring your children with you! Look for the sign in the hallway.

## Mark Your Calendars!

Would you like more information about Philomath Montessori School? You can always call the school at **929-2672**. We'll be glad to send you a brochure about our primary school program.