

Media-Providence Friends School

Dragon Tales

Spring 2008

Narratives of the Magic of MPFS

Minding the Light

George Fox, founder of the Religious Society of Friends, called fellow Quakers to “Walk cheerfully over the earth, answering that of God in everyone.” For 400 years, the fundamental belief that there is something of God (or the Light) in every person has formed the basis for Friends’ values. These values, referred to as testimonies, are often recalled through the mnemonic “SPICE”: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality.

At MPFS, students are exposed to these values in Quakerism class. During this class time, we also actively seek to learn about the diverse religious beliefs of MPFS families and faculty, as well as others. Within our school community in any given year are Christians of numerous denominations, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, along with agnostics and atheists. The study and sharing of the multiplicity of religious traditions helps teach all of us to respect and learn from others’ points of view and is one way we honor “the Light in each person.”

Quaker Studies for preschool through 5th grade students coincides with Library class where T. Becky often incorporates age-appropriate literature as a starting point for lessons. T. Laura, school counselor, teaches 6th grade Quaker History and Peer Mediation, 7th graders look at Quaker testimonies in the context of current events with T. Nancy, and 8th graders study world

religions with T. David. Quakerism informs other subjects too. In Social Studies, study of the civil war leads to discussions about Equality and Peace. In Science, the need to care for our environment speaks to the Simplicity and Community testimonies. In Language Arts, a literature circle may find subject matter lending itself to conversations about Integrity. And, with teachers employing the testimonies to

Then, there’s the doing. The “walking cheerfully” element of Fox’s instruction speaks to Friends’ responsibility to bring the testimonies closer to everyday reality. This proactive prong of Quakerism drives service learning initiatives at MPFS (a topic which merits its own issue of *Dragon Tales* – look for it next year!).

Together, Quakerism coursework, service learning, Meeting for Worship, and the infusion of Quaker ideas throughout the curriculum and community of MPFS, seek to nurture young people who know that the material world is not all there is to life; who have the courage to follow “the inward argument where it leads”; who are equipped to make a difference in the world. David Kahn, teacher at Sandy Springs Friends School describes the goal of Quaker education this way: “If we do a good job of educating, then critical consciousness will follow.

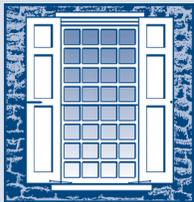
If we are critically conscious, we must recognize that we are not isolated in the world, that we never act wholly independently in the world, that all we do is connected to others. True education, honest education, REAL education drives us out into the world to do something.”

And that, Friends and friends, is what it’s all about.



establish community expectations in the classroom, everything gets connected to Quakerism.

Meeting for Worship provides another context for Quaker experience. Each week, the entire school gathers in the meeting room for personal reflection in silence. Students and teachers are encouraged to speak, if so moved. The unstructured nature of Meeting, with its emphasis on the energy of the gathered group, affords children of all faiths a space for spiritual growth.



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This Newsletter is a publication of MPFS. If you have moved recently or are planning to move, be sure to give us your new address so that you can continue to receive uninterrupted mailings.

Media-Providence Friends School is a PreK-8 Quaker day school which provides a rich educational experience where academic challenge is combined with the teaching of values.

 Printed on recycled paper.

Successful PAIS Accreditation Visit Ends on a Snowy Day in February

“You ooze your mission everywhere...” These were gratifying words to hear for us as a school community. A sort of summary in and of themselves, they were the preface to the closing comments of Steve Nierenberg, the chair of our accreditation team, in what may have been PAIS’ first closing report via Skype teleconference (bad weather precluded the live presentation to faculty that typically concludes such a visit).

The seven member accreditation team, drawn from area independent schools (Oak Lane, Miquon, Friends School Haverford, Newtown Friends), poked into every nook and cranny, asked lots of questions of faculty, staff, parents, board members and students, compared our curriculum with what we say we do, saw to it that our procedures reflect best practices, and that we are living what we profess. Our Quaker character was very clear to them both in intentional teaching and infused in the everyday life of the school. Quakerism is both “taught and caught”.

Our visitors witnessed mutual commitment and respect between teachers and students. They could see the integration of science, social studies, service learning, and language arts curricula.

They noticed our ties to the wider community: the sharing of our resources and use of local institutions. Lessons they observed were creative, engaging, meaningful and connected. One visitor said he’d like to take some of our parents, trustees and children back to his school!

Finances, governance, long-range planning, admissions and development are strong. Our facilities are lovely and safe. Management of financial aid, hiring, personnel and communications are orderly and mission-centered.

We are in very good shape and poised to press on with our goals. As the visiting team was a mirror for us, they confirmed what we identified as the next major issues facing MPFS: creatively meeting enrollment challenges faced by all small schools; refining the scope and sequence for skill development across the whole school (keeping in mind the “21st Century Student”); reviewing technology for academic and administrative purposes; continuing to clarify, affirm, and strengthen the relationship with Media Meeting on whose land we sit.

The accreditation gave us pause to reflect, opened us to review by our peers, and ultimately verified that we are strong and ready to move forward to the next challenges. Onward and upward!



*Scilla emerging in the Friendly
Garden amidst snow*

The 1876 Society

The 1876 Society (named for the year Media Friends School was established) was created to honor those who have provided long-term gift planning in order to support future generations of MPFS students. Comprised of past and present trustees, alumni, faculty, parents and grandparents, its members share a deep regard for the work we do here for children in their formative years.

Planned gifts build endowment to underwrite capital improvements, technology infrastructure, facilities maintenance, and will provide supplemental income for financial aid and faculty salaries. All of this adds to the richness of the education we provide.

The following individuals have made MPFS a priority in their charitable giving. Their gifts have come through bequests, charitable gift annuities, trusts, and other vehicles. More importantly, their gifts have come from their hearts and extend to many children. We are deeply grateful for their generosity.

Alice Pennell Allen*
Geraldine Donovan
Murry Engle Lauser*
William and Lynn Oberfeld

Katherine* and William* Camp
Marian D. Elkinton
Manley and Phyllis Mincer
Mary H.* and William D. Ravdin

Nancy C. DeMis and Bruce Turetsky
Bruce E. Hunt
Paul Ness
William K. Scull

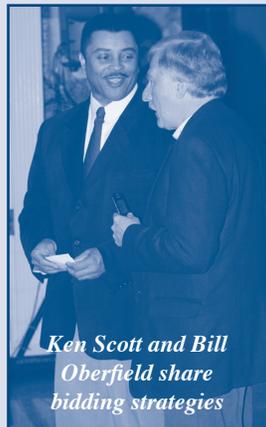
*Deceased

If you have named MPFS beneficiary of a deferred gift but your name is not listed above, we welcome you to the 1876 Society and urge you to contact us so that you can be recognized. If you have not arranged for a planned gift but would like more information, please contact Phyllis Mincer, Director of Development, 610-565-1960 x106; pmincer@fox.mpfs.org.

2008 Spring Auction



Teacher Karen Carbutt and Sonia Stamm catch up during the evening's festivities



Ken Scott and Bill Oberfeld share bidding strategies



Donn Guthrie, his father Don Guthrie and Susan Rhile mingle before the silent auction gets underway

Thanks to all those who helped make this year's auction our most successful ever!

MERASI Visit Thanks to Cultural Enrichment Fund

Two years ago, MPFS hosted six musicians and a dancer from Rajasthan, India who shared songs that they and their ancestors had been performing in the Thar Desert for more than 37 generations. We fell in love! Their "Hearts with Hope 2 Tour" brought the MERASI back to the states this spring for appearances at the Kennedy Center, the American Visionary Arts Museum and the Smithsonian. With the help of the school's Mary B. Elkinton Fund for Cultural Enrichment, they also stopped at MPFS. It was a thrill to be able to welcome them back for a full day of interactive assemblies with students, as well as for a S.R.O. public performance on campus to kick off Media Arts Council's April Second Saturday Arts Stroll for the wider community.

The MERASI – Aman, Anwar, Chhuge, Karim, Pinku, Rasul and Sarwar - won't soon be forgotten. Through exuberant music and dance, they shared their experiences as members of the marginalized "untouchable caste" in their community within Rajasthan's Jaisalmar District. Their musicianship and unbridled joy were enriching and inspiring.



Marion Elkinton, daughter-in-law to Mary B. Elkinton, with MERASI leader Sarwar Khan

Alumni Focus: Martha Chamberlain

Among the donations at this year's auction were 4 tickets to the Pennsylvania Ballet and backstage passes to meet the dancers. Media Friends School alumna and Principal Dancer Martha Chamberlain made this special donation.

Martha's career as a student here paralleled her career as a dancer -- she enrolled in her first dance class at the Media Fellowship House the same year that she entered kindergarten at MFS (she recalls her jolly, red-haired kindergarten teacher, T. Lynn, with much fondness). At 10, she enrolled in West Chester's Dance Center, an affiliate of the Brandywine Ballet Company. While honing dance skills there, she enjoyed her middle school days at Friends. Particularly memorable were eclectic "mini courses" offered on Wednesday afternoons by Teachers Glenn, Gray and others, in which she and her friends could immerse themselves in such topics as spiders, bike repair, photography and poetry.

After graduating in eighth grade, Martha moved on to high school at Providence Friends and then Friends Select. She joined the Pennsylvania Ballet Company when she was 19 and has remained ever since (she even met husband and fellow dancer Jonathan Stiles there). When not performing in a production, Martha designs costumes and teaches ballet to the next generation of dancers.

Martha values the lessons in tolerance that she learned at MFS. Relating to people of different backgrounds and beliefs from a young age prepared her for encounters with a range of perspectives in her professional life. She also attributes a strong sense of self to the Quaker practice of addressing teachers by their first name. "It fostered open relationships. Teachers really heard us."

For those interested in seeing our famed alum on stage, Martha will be dancing in the Pennsylvania Ballet Company's upcoming production of "Carnivale of the Animals" in June.



**Acknowledged for an accomplishment? Get a new job? Have a new baby? Just finished writing your first novel?
Recently married? Send photos of your special moments to jpeterson@fox.mfps.org or
Janice Peterson, Media-Providence Friends School, 125 West Third Street, Media, PA 19063.**



Alumni Focus: Lexi Mincer

One need look no further than Alexis Mincer to learn whether a Friends education promotes independence, a thirst for knowledge, and appreciation for diversity.

Lexi, daughter of our own Teacher Phyllis, is a 2001 graduate. Reflecting on her 9 years at MPFS, she notes "The environment allowed me to feel safe to be myself and to be friends with kids of all races, religions and economic backgrounds." Lexi also appreciated teachers' respect. "In middle school, the teachers would treat us like adults, or at least high school students [smile]. We could sit with T. Nancy and talk about anything. When I went on Penncrest for high school, I learned that my experience was pretty unique."

In 2005, Lexi entered Guilford College majoring in Biology. During breaks, she sought opportunities for travel, spending time in India, Israel and eastern Europe. Looking for a more extended travel experience, she spent last fall in Kenya completing a 14-week Wildlife Biology Field Study program. She quickly realized that she didn't find the wildlife nearly as compelling as the Kenyan people. She wanted to see the "real Kenya" so, at the close of her term, Lexi stayed on. A quick internet search located a clinic in Nairobi seeking volunteers, and so, with nothing more than her backpack and a strong desire to be of help, she made her way there and offered her services. Immediately she was delivering babies, setting up IV's, and doing anything else that was needed. For a young woman with no formal medical training, the work was exciting. It felt good to be serving others.

Events took a dramatic turn, however, when the Kenyan elections were held. As warring tribes began rioting in the streets to protest the election, Lexi found herself living in the middle of a revolt. Recognizing that it was no longer safe, she left the country in mid-January. She says of the experience, "My educational background gives me hope that there will be peace for the Kenyans."

As Lexi prepares to graduate from Guilford this December, she is already making plans for her next adventure. Don't tell Teacher Phyllis, but she's off to South America. According to Lexi, "All you need is an open mind and a backpack."

Nurturing Each Nature

These days, developmental psychologists rarely take extreme positions on the nature vs. nurture debate. Research shows that both innate and environmental influences play their parts in shaping who we become. It's generally agreed, though, that children are more "sponge-like" than adults... like Bounty brand paper towels, they're "quicker picker-uppers".

It is in the formative elementary years that children begin to develop values, life, decision-making and communication skills, and to acquire attitudes towards themselves, peers, school and social groups. Our classroom teachers play a primary role in helping students achieve healthy development in these areas, aided by a formal Guidance curriculum.

Child-centered and preventative, Guidance at MPFS is integral to the overall school program, complementing learning in each classroom at every stage of child development. Working to teach students perspicacity, confidence, self-advocacy, tolerance, optimism and kindness, as well as interpersonal, problem solving and conflict resolution skills, school counselor Laura Taylor collaborates with staff, faculty, parents and the community to create an atmosphere that lends itself to student success in acquiring these tools for life. As is the case throughout the school, best practices are used; research-driven curriculum reaches every student in the school.

Group Guidance class is a time of paying attention to the whole child, addressing the social, emotional and personal development of students as well as aspects of physical health. These lessons help children to understand themselves and others and give them problem-solving strategies to use when they are having a conflict or a concern. Lessons also help our community apply the Quaker testimonies of Equality, Community, Peace, Integrity and Simplicity to MPFS school life (as with other subjects, Guidance and Quakerism often cross-pollinate and inform each other). By emphasizing this kind



of affective education in each classroom, we support the acquisition of skills that keep our school a safe learning community.

Counseling, meanwhile, provides on a one-on-one basis what Guidance is able to provide to groups, assisting individual children to feel more comfortable at school, more successful as a student and classmate. When students receive counseling services, their classes benefit. With counseling, students can contribute to a better learning atmosphere,



stronger friendships, safer play, etc., because they have been able to address the issues that have interfered with their learning and the learning of others.

In middle school, students have Advisory once per week to focus on Wellness in its fullest sense. Issues important in the school community are topics at this group gathering. As the middle schoolers are the role models for other students, any new awareness they receive has an impact on the Lower School population. Advisory also addresses the unique emotional needs of adolescents, including exposure to effective responses to common problems. Sessions cover Handling Anger, Coping with Depression, Cyberbullying and Proper Use of the Internet, Motivation, Assertiveness, Dimensions of Wellness, and Communicating Needs.

Regardless of the "format" in which Guidance lessons are conveyed, deep coverage of developmentally appropriate topics and rehearsal of behaviors are important components of every session. In addition, close collaboration between T. Laura and each classroom teacher allows for carryover of learning after each session.





Meet T. Laura — Counselor, Quakerism Teacher, Friend

Ask students to describe Teacher Laura Taylor and replies invariably include the words

“kind” and “friend.” As school guidance counselor, 6th grade Quakerism teacher, and 8th grade Conflict Resolution Training Program co-advisor, Laura connects with each child in the school, always responding to the good in each.

Laura plays cello and holds a BFA in Music from Carnegie Mellon. While at CMU, she took a graduate level class in Music Education & Therapy at Duquesne University that was to change the course of her intended career. Through work with special needs kids, she found that building children’s self esteem held more appeal than teaching music theory. So strong was

this leading, she spent the next decade as a music therapist at long term care facilities in the Pittsburgh area.

A move provided an opening to return to graduate school. She obtained her MS in Counseling at Villanova and took a part time job as counselor at Plymouth Meeting Friends School. Then Head of School Ginny Christiansen got wind of this arrangement and brought Laura here part time too. Ultimately we just had to have her full time...she’s been here for 12 years now!

Laura appreciates the community at MPFS, saying “It’s an environment where what each person brings is valued, teachers and students are truly friends, and collaboration breeds deep learning.” She likes that the school is working to better the world, that there is acknowledgement that this takes a community, and that teachers are engaged in modeling this.

Laura lives in Blue Bell with her husband Ken, an economics professor at Villanova and with whom she has three children: Maija (19, an alum), Eric (22) and Evan (25). She loves her family pets: Copper, a golden retriever, Beau, a Bernese mountain dog, and Mango and Coconut the parakeets. She enjoys hiking, travel, biographies, needlepoint and cooking ethnic foods.

She is a member of Gwynned Meeting where she is active on the Religious Education Committee and helps run a children’s Peace Camp each summer. She has also served on PYM’s Nonviolence and Children Committee for over 20 years, giving workshops to schools and organizations on nurturing peacemaking in children, diversity and Quaker testimonies.

One day, Laura imagines that she might get back to playing that cello. Until then, we are so glad she’s here being our “kind friend!”

IMPORTANT DATES:
Staff Appreciation Luncheon - May 23 • 5th Grade Recognition - June 2 • 8th Grade Graduation - June 6



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