



The Observatory

Los Gatos-Saratoga Observation Nursery School ~ Issue 1, September 2003

Writing Observations: A Time of Discovery

by Marie Imai, LGSONS Director

Dear families,

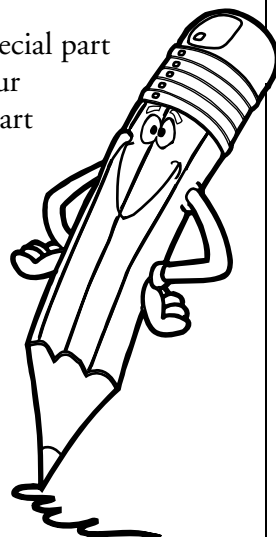
Welcome to this brand new year at Mountain School! All the teachers are eager to meet their new classes – to greet and get acquainted with those of you attending our school for the first time and to catch up on the news and activities of our returning alumni. For me the beginning of school is like a birthday, only better, for I suddenly receive a whole new family of friends of all ages full of joy and continual surprises. For most of us the routine of attending school regularly is soothing after the freedom of summer vacations and the hectic times of getting ready and returning home. It is particularly reassuring to children to know what to expect each day.

Please remember, however, that it takes most children (and many adults) a good while to feel comfortable in new situations. So, no matter how eager you are for your child to explore, try all the activities offered and begin to make friends, offer first your quiet, supportive presence until your child is ready. We all have our unique timetables and we have a whole year ahead of us. There is more than enough time to work in the garden, try on all the dress-ups, hold a banana slug, wade in the creek or make your own quesadilla. If not the first day, then the second or the third.

And now I want to get you excited about a very special part of our school – writing observations. It is one of our unique aspects and so important that it has been part of our name – Los Gatos-Saratoga Observation Nursery School – since our founding in 1957.

A few years ago, one of the parents in the 4/5s class, Debbie Wilhelm, shared with me that their whole family was preparing for her son Andrew's Bar Mitzvah. Debbie had recently located her observation notes of Andrew's year in the Saturday 2s, which included an observation by Andrew's grandfather, who is no longer living. She and her husband were thrilled to be able to

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Welcome!

by Angie Davidson, Board President

Welcome to
the 2003-04
school year!



We have had a wonderful summer, and I hope you have too. We enjoyed every minute of the long, warm days, filling them with camping, hiking, swimming, stomping through creeks, picking flowers, playing at the beach, and visiting family and friends. We planted a vegetable garden, carefully tended it, and were rewarded with delicious tomatoes, basil, strawberries, carrots and eggplants, as well as fragrant herbs. Julia even found a few blueberries, her favorite thing, on our tiny blueberry bush. Every day she and Sophie came in with fistfuls of flowers and herbs to put into any container possible: roses, lavender, sweet peas, cosmos, salvia, flowering thyme, mint. They have been so proud of all the wonderful things that have grown from the tiny seeds or young plants we've planted.

The girls have grown as much as the garden has. Physically they've suddenly outgrown almost all their clothes, and they're jumping, running, dancing and trying new things faster than ever. Their

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share his grandfather's descriptions of Andrew on this very important milestone day in the life of their son.

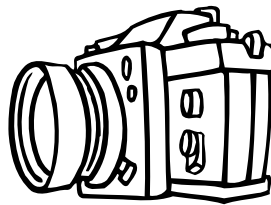
So, look upon the requirement to write observations as a special opportunity to record forever (use a pen instead of a pencil) your child's choice of activities on that particular day. Use good descriptive words, give interesting details of who is present and what is happening and record conversations when possible. Indicate why you think your child might be behaving as he/she is and add your own reaction or feelings about what is going on. Questions for your teacher can also be included because we consider your notes an important communication tool to share. For those of you new to this process there is a notebook in the parents' room with samples from other parents written over the years. Jeanne Dominguez has also submitted an observation as an article for this newsletter (see page 6). We are never concerned with spelling or grammar, just legibility, because they are your notes to keep.

Writing observations should be a time of discovery for you, a luxurious time to focus your attention directly on your child and to study the connections he or she makes with things and with people at school. As an observer you are free to remain detached and let the teachers handle any conflicts that naturally arise in a normal school day.

Your notes will become an invaluable keepsake, a record of your child's growth and development, his/her personality characteristics and behavior common to this age at the time. Above all else, enjoy these observations as a special gift of time for yourself and your child and don't hesitate to share any questions you may have about the process with your teacher. I can't wait to meet you all this fall.

Love,
Marie ☺

Fall Family Photos



Saturday September 27 and Sunday October 5
at Oak Meadow Park,
Los Gatos

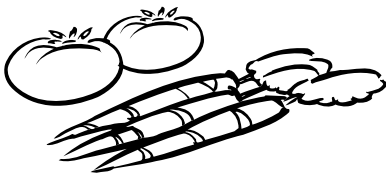
Color family photos will be taken in a beautiful outdoor location at Oak Meadow Park

both days in the morning by appointment only. Please call Susan J. Weiland directly to book your appointment. You may call September 8 or after: 408-996-1933, Monday through Friday, 10 am to 8 pm.

Sitting fee will be only \$20 due the day of your portrait, cash or check only. Make checks payable to Susan J. Weiland. Each sitting will consist of six to ten photos and up to two poses. Proofs and order forms will be delivered to the school approximately one to two weeks later, when orders can be made.☺

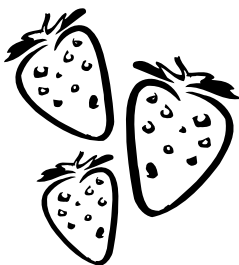
(Welcome, continued)

vocabularies have expanded, they're capable of a little more patience and perseverance; they're more self-confident and increasingly they come up with creative solutions to their problems. I really can't believe how fast they're changing. Maybe the sunshine and long, warm days help them grow too, or maybe it's just that with summer's slower pace, I've been able to watch and notice more.



And now we return (already!) to school. What makes Mountain School so wonderful is that our school year will be filled with these same joys: those of the outdoors and of watching our children grow. They'll hike and splash, watch birds and collect leaves, tend a garden and reap flowers and veggies, cook and bake fresh things. And we'll take time out of our busy lives to be right there with them, watching them grow, taking note. It is proof once again of how amazing and unique the Mountain School is.

Let the fun begin! ~



Our Approach to Nature

Reprinted from "The Observatory" Newsletter, September 1991 Issue

Holding Nursery School classes in the out-of-doors is an ideal way for preschool children to learn to be "at home" with their basic natural surroundings. It gives them a ready-made laboratory where they can learn by touching, handling, smelling, hearing and seeing the wonders of nature close at hand. We see and encourage feelings of delight, wonder, surprise and curiosity in the children as they share their discoveries with friends, teachers and observing parents.

The basic goals of our program are: 1) To encourage positive feelings and attitudes in children toward the out-of-doors; 2) to increase their ability to move about and feel comfortable in an outdoor setting, and 3) to learn about nature.

Children who are not accustomed to large outdoor spaces need the support of their parent, friend or teacher to feel more secure in a strange setting. Then they are able, gradually, to move on to more fun and discovery with their friends. Other children are immediately "at home" with the hills and creeks by virtue of their previous experiences and one may need a reminder to stay where they can "see the teachers," which is a firm rule of the school. As teachers, we must feel free to ask the children not to take unknown climbs or sliding paths that may have hidden sharp stones and may be hazardous to sliding or have heavy poison oak growth. If several children are eager to follow an interest that leads them out of view of the teacher, we request that the parent or carpool mom stay in the area with these children to supervise and bring them back to the general area as soon as it seems wise.



As part of learning about nature we can encourage language and concept development based on "real life experiences" by using specific and correct terminology when referring to the various flora and fauna, creek life, and insect habits whenever possible. It is important not to overload the children with terminology, but we do identify in passing either specifically or by grouping (or both) so that children who want to learn and know the correct name can do so. Our aim is not to "show off," but to present names to be used in a natural way of speaking in order to identify and express one's ideas clearly.

One of the most effective ways of "teaching" results from the modeling of the teacher and parent. If they love and enjoy living, growing things outdoors, this will pass on to the children. Children pick up the way we react to the new, the interesting, the lovely. They learn by imitating our

(Continued on page 4)

(Approach to Nature, continued)

interest in the “cycle of life” and concern for the balance of nature. Since there are so many plants growing profusely in both school settings, we allow the children to pick them at will with the exception of the California poppies (explaining that it is unlawful to pick the state flower). Children may remove stream life or interesting insects to the observation pans temporarily, but they are returned to their natural habitat to preserve the balance of nature for others to enjoy. (Such life may not be taken home.)

Nature walks are sometimes an important part of the school day, especially with 2's and 3's. The teacher leads the group; when she stops to look, comment upon, or touch interesting discoveries by the side of the trail, this information should be passed to the parent behind or assign a parent to pass this information on to those behind as the teacher proceeds with the walk. Parents should be alerted to watching for special “finds” or responding as the children discover their own subjects of interest on these walks.

Listed below are some of the nature life the teachers may wish to call by name. How many you name should be determined by the interest of the children, but care should be taken not to underestimate the interest of the children. They can always cast-off the name but if it is not presented, they cannot know. A real, meaningful experience can only be acquired by the accompanying sensory learning preceding



or coinciding with the verbalization.

TREES

Redwood: and redwood cones, touch rough bark.



Bay or California

Laurel: Leaves have distinctive odor; climbing tree at Saratoga Springs is one. Sometimes we find a green bay “nut,” the seed.

Sycamore: Large leaves, much like maple leaves but “fingers” are longer; grows near streams often; gray, mottled bark.

Maple: Leaves of varying sizes, spinners dry enough in the Fall for flying from bridge at Saratoga Springs; also have tiny prickles in Fall on seed pod part of spinner; spinners in Spring can be separated and stuck on forehead as a “horn” for a bit of fun.

Alder: Profuse at Saratoga Springs; rather small, dark green, shiny leaf; watch for alder cones, the seed-carrying cones, green in Spring and brown in Fall.

Douglas Fir: Cones are to be found in the area of climbing tree as there is one tree in that area, just to the left of the climbing hill. These cones are a favorite “treasure.”

Oak: There are a number of kinds at both school settings; leaves are rather scalloped with pointed scallops; acorns can be found, some already partly eaten by squirrels or insects. The acorn caps are sometimes attached, most often not by the time we find them. The nuts are poisonous for human consumption.

Madrone: With orange bark that peels off.

OTHERS

Moss: Soft, lovely patterns on rocks, grows longer and lush with rain.

Lichen ('Li-ken): a type of fungus, grey, varying in designs, interesting to compare with moss.

Fungus: Various manifestations.

Banana Slugs: Caution children not to let them climb on their jackets as they leave an unwashable film in their wake.



Water Striders: Watch them “skate” or “stride” across the water.

Caddis Worms: Turning into flies mid-May; found on underwater rocks.

Salamanders and Eggs: Hatching in mid-May.

Newts: Reddish-brown in color.

Frogs and Eggs: Hatching in mid-May; discuss cycle and have eggs, polliwogs and baby frogs for observation.

Algae: For water life to feed on.

Lizards: Blue bellies, swifts.

Box Elder Bugs: The flying “beetles” with black wings and red back that shows when they fly. They mate and often have a nest of dry grass just above where we park our cars.

Stellar Jays: The blue bird with the “cap” on his head.

Sour Grass: Sour grass hill at Saratoga Springs. Edible.

Miner's Lettuce: Edible in early Spring; was lettuce for miners. ∞

Support Our School — At No Cost to You!

by Jane Johnson,
eScrip & Schoolpop Coordinator

We're so lucky to be a part of such a true community here at Mountain School! And, what a better win-win way to support our school and community than through a path that costs you nothing: eScrip & Schoolpop! All you do is continue to shop where you already do, or order online through an interface to your favorite retailers, and our school receives funds based on your regular shopping.

You can sign up for both programs through the web (www.escrip.com and www.schoolpop.com) or by completing the forms and returning via mail.

Please take time to register and our school and community will benefit!

If you have any questions, I'll do my best to answer them. Please call me at 408-425-8723 or e-mail jcwjohns@yahoo.com. Just type "Mountain School" somewhere in your subject line. Thanks for your support!

Correction: A mistake was made during the new families' presentation. Vons (not Albertsons) has joined the fundraising effort; Sorry! The following stores also participate: Safeway • PetsMart • Whole Foods • OfficeMax • Payless Shoesource • Gap • Barnes&Noble • Eddie Bauer • LandsEnd • TechDepot • Gardener's Supply, etc. ∞

Calendar

CALENDAR						
		15				

GENERAL MEETING – OCTOBER 15

The General Meeting has been moved to Wednesday, October 15. Join us at 7 pm at Lakeside School. Barbara Porro will be returning to offer us additional skills in managing children's conflicts.

TURKEY TROT – SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9

Mark your calendars! The Mountain School First Annual Turkey Trot will be held on Sunday November 9th.

A fun 5k run... walk... trot... strut... stroll and roll through Vasona Park and a very special Turkey Treasure Loop for little ones!



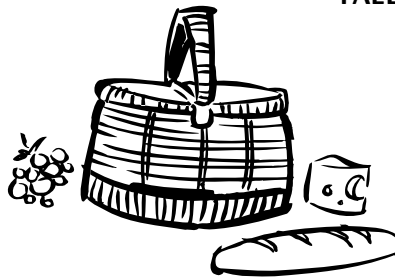
Fun for the entire family – even your animals – as well as your friends and neighbors.

Food and entertainment will follow the Trot.

Watch for more details to follow. Any questions or suggestions, call Mary Matlack 408-358-3535.

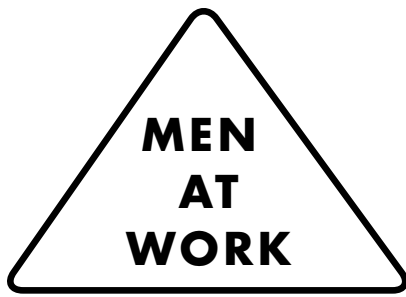
FALL PICNIC – SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12

Our Annual Fall Picnic will be Sunday, October 12.



Please Take Note: this date is different from the date of October 19, originally published in the school calendar.

Plan to spend the afternoon with family and Mountain School friends at Saratoga Springs. Details coming soon.

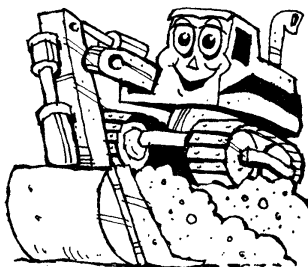


**A MTN SCHOOL OBSERVATION
3/4/5s CLASS OCT. 10, 2002,
SARATOGA SPRINGS**

by **Jeanne Dominguez**
Mara's mom, 4/5's

The boys are very busy in the sand pile. Torin and Kieran are busy with trucks and shovels, planning and constructing a road. Keavon and Bryce are digging with shovels and buckets of various sizes, planting different varieties of trees. There a couple of small skirmishes over territory, but the two teams are able to accommodate each other and their expanding projects. Other friends come and go, watching commenting, exchanging ideas. But the "core four" remain for most of the early afternoon, very involved, absorbed in the process, laboring together in an easy camaraderie.

Camiron comes by and watches silently for a minute or two. She picks up a spade and begins scooping sand out of a large barrel the boys have filled and then abandoned. Keavon sees this and shouts "No!" as he races over to her. "You're not allowed!" He steps in front of the bin and

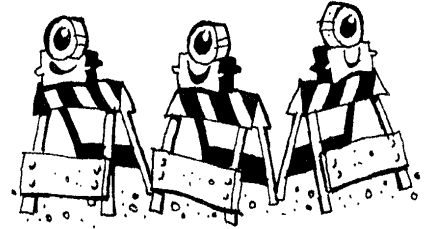


blocks her access to it. Camiron doesn't move, but stops scooping and looks steadily at Keavon.

Teacher Laura comes by and kneels down next to them. "Keavon, Camiron looks like she had an idea for this sand, and no one was around." Keavon replies, emphatically, "We're using that!" Teacher Laura turns to Keavon and says "Keavon, do you have a message for Camiron?" Keavon turns away and lays across the top of the barrel, his torso covering the sand, his arms and legs stretched out like a parachuter. Laura moves around to face him, Camiron still close by, watching and taking it all in. "Keavon, we need to talk about the sand." Caitlin and Amelia join the group. Amelia and Camiron begin digging in the ground around Keavon and the bin. Keavon explains to Laura why the girls can't touch the bin. "It's sewer water," he explains.

The girls stop momentarily and look at him, then at Laura. Laura looks back at all three. "Hmm. What are we going to do? Any ideas?" Silent stares. "Keavon, how were you going to use it?" Keavon, still balancing on the rim of the barrel, looks at Laura. Speaking softly so only she can hear and gesturing with his arms, he explains. Laura listens, nods. "Do you like to be asked?" she says to him. "Yes." says Keavon, calm and serious now. "In a friendly way?" "Yes!" he says as his face lights up with relief. "Mmmm." Laura nods her

head. Keavon takes a deep breath, climbs down and begins scooping sand out of the bin with Amelia. Camiron has moved on to the stick horses and Caitlin joins Keavon and Amelia, scooping



and dumping. Keavon and Amelia work quietly on opposite sides of the barrel.

Camiron returns and offers Keavon a look at something in her hand. She looks at him, puzzled, as he shakes his head and advises her, "Don't use it." Camiron shrugs and joins Mara and Bella on the climbing structure. Keavon returns to his re-forestation efforts. ♪

Newsletter Contributions

by **Nicole Frees,**
Newsletter Chair

We'd love to hear from you! If you have a story, recipe, thought, poem, kids' project, or some other message that would be appropriate for the school newsletter, then send it my way.

The deadline for the next issue of "The Observatory" is: Friday, October 3. Please e-mail met at nfrees@sbcglobal.net with your submission. If you do not have e-mail, then you may reach me at 650-961-4016. ♪