



The Observatory

Los Gatos-Saratoga Observation Nursery School  Issue 6, April 2003

Enjoy the Great Outdoors

by Marie Imai, School Director

Dear Families,

I can't believe that our school year is almost over already. Not only have these eight months flown by so quickly but also all the years I've been at Mountain School. Today is my son Eric's 35th birthday and he attended LGSONS as a two year old in 1970. Next fall his daughter, Megan, will attend one of our 2s classes and the cycle will begin again.

I feel so blessed to have three grandchildren, Alexander, 8, Danielle, 5, and Megan, 2, with whom I can experience the joys of discovering our world once again. Just watching the children at school enjoying the baby chicks so much inspired me to buy some more to have at home for Megan and Danielle to hold and to care for. When Megan arrived last week after one of our

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Closing Words

by Dianne O'Neil, Board Chair

The school year is slowly drawing to a close – I am reminded of this as we prepare to move to our outside location. How are you going to culminate the year at Mountain School for your child? This question is on our minds now as final circle meetings will be springing up soon, and we will share the year's laughs, milestones and activities of our children.

The Board of Directors for next year has been set; there are still a few positions ready and waiting for someone special to take them on! Facilities Management, Community Service and Short Range Planning positions are in need of being filled – if you are interested in finding out more about these volunteer jobs, give me a call (408.884.1974). Volunteering for the Board has many perks, and helping to direct the school is great experience, not to mention... *fun!*

My year as Chair is wrapping up soon too. I will be handing the reins over to Angie Davidson, who will oversee the 2003-2004 Board of Directors. Thank you especially to Marie Imai and this year's Board – it has been my pleasure to work with such a supportive, helpful and wonderful group. Adieu!

Happy Spring!



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On Being the Mommy

by Anna Quindlen

submitted by Jutta Braken-Guelke,
Alexander's Mom in 3's Class

If not for the photographs, I might have a hard time believing they ever existed. The pensive infant with the swipe of dark bangs and the black button eyes of a Raggedy Andy doll. The placid baby with the yellow ringlets and the high piping voice. The sturdy toddler with the lower lip that curled into an apostrophe above her chin. *All my babies* are gone now.

I say this not in sorrow but in disbelief. I take great satisfaction in what I have today: three almost-adults, two taller than I am, one closing in fast. Three people who read the same books I do and have learned not to be afraid of disagreeing with me in their opinion of them, who sometimes tell vulgar jokes that make me laugh until I choke and cry, who need razor blades and shower gel and privacy, who want to keep their doors closed more than I like. Who, miraculously, go to the bathroom, zip up their jackets and move food from plate to mouth all by themselves. Like the trick soap I bought for the bathroom with a rubber ducky at its center, the baby is buried deep within each, barely discernible except through the unreliable haze of the past.

Everything in all the books I once pored over is finished for me now. Penelope Leach. T. Berry Brazelton. Dr. Spock. The

ones on sibling rivalry and sleeping through the night and early-childhood education, all grown obsolete. Along with *Goodnight Moon* and *Where the Wild Things Are*, they are battered, spotted, well used. But I suspect that if you flipped the pages dust would rise like memories.

What those books taught me, finally, and what the women on the playground taught me, and the well-meaning relations – what they taught me was that they couldn't really teach me very much at all. Raising children is presented at first as a true-false test, then becomes multiple choice, until finally, far along, you realize that it is an endless essay. No one knows anything. One child responds well to positive reinforcement, another can be managed only with a stern voice and a timeout. One boy is toilet trained at 3, his brother at 2. When my first child was born, parents were told to put baby to bed on his belly so that he would not choke on his own spit-up. By the time my last arrived, babies were put down on their backs because of research on sudden infant death syndrome. To a new parent this ever-shifting certainty is terrifying, and then soothing. Eventually you must learn to trust yourself. Eventually the research will follow.

First science said environment was the great shaper of human nature. But it certainly seemed as though those babies had distinct personalities, some contemplative, some gregarious, some crabby. And eventually science

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(On Being the Mommy, continued)

said that was right, and that they were hard-wired exactly as we had suspected.

Still, the temptation to defer to the experts was huge. The literate parent, who approaches everything; cooking, decorating, life as though there were a paper due or an exam scheduled, is in particular peril when the kids arrive.

ego and my inadequacies to help them do that.

I remember 15 years ago poring over one of Dr. Brazelton's wonderful books on child development, in which he describes three different sorts of infants: average, quiet, and active. I was looking for a sub-quiet codicil for an 18-month-old who did not walk. Was there something wrong with his fat little legs? Was there some-

persons for the first two seasons. What was I thinking?

But the biggest mistake I made is the one that most of us make while doing this. I did not live in the moment enough. This is particularly clear now that the moment is gone, captured only in photographs. There is one picture of the three of them sitting in the grass on a quilt in the shadow of the swing set on a summer day,

"But the biggest mistake I made is the one that most of us make while doing this. I did not live in the moment enough."

How silly it all seems now, the obsessing about language acquisition and physical milestones, the riding the waves of normal, gifted, hyperactive, all those labels that reduced individuality to a series of cubbyholes. But I could not help myself. I had watched my mother casually raise five children born over 10 years, but by watching her intuitively knew that I was engaged in the greatest and potentially most catastrophic task of my life. I knew that there were mothers who had worried with good reason, that there were children who would have great challenges to meet.

We were lucky; ours were not among them. Nothing horrible or astonishing happened: there was hernia surgery, some stitches, a broken arm and a fuchsia cast to go with it. Mostly ours were the ordinary everyday terrors and miracles of raising a child, and our children's challenges the old familiar ones of learning to live as themselves in the world. The trick was to get past my fears, my

thing wrong with his tiny little mind? Was he developmentally delayed, physically challenged? Was I insane? Last year he went to China. Next year he goes to college. He can talk just fine. He can walk, too.

Every part of raising children is humbling, too. Believe me, mistakes were made. They have all been enshrined in the Remember-When-Mom-Did Hall of Fame. The outbursts, the temper tantrums, the bad language, mine, not theirs. The times the baby fell off the bed. The times I arrived late for preschool pickup. The nightmare sleepover. The horrible summer camp. The day when the youngest came barreling out of the classroom with a 98 on her geography test, and I responded, What did you get wrong? (She insisted I include that.) The time I ordered food at the McDonald's drive-through speaker and then drove away without picking it up from the window. (They all insisted I include that.) I did not allow them to watch the Sim-

ages 6, 4 and 1. And I wish I could remember what we ate, and what we talked about, and how they sounded, and how they looked when they slept that night. I wish I had not been in such a hurry to get on to the next thing: dinner, bath, book, bed. I wish I had treasured the doing a little more and the getting it done a little less.

Even today I'm not sure what worked and what didn't, what was me and what was simply life. When they were very small, I suppose I thought someday they would become who they were because of what I'd done. Now I suspect they simply grew into their true selves because they demanded in a thousand ways that I back off and let them be. The books said to be relaxed and I was often tense, matter-of-fact and I was sometimes over the top.

And look how it all turned out. I wound up with the three people I like best in the world, who have done more than anyone to excavate my essential humanity.

(Continued on page 8)

Spring Picnic & Inaugural Annual Alumnae Day!

by Alex Cortes and Kari Wallick,
Social Chairs

Our annual Spring picnic is upon us! This year we also celebrate the return of alumnae families back to the schoolhouse. Please join us on:

*Sunday, May 4
12:30 pm – 3:30 pm, at
the Schoolhouse on Black Road*

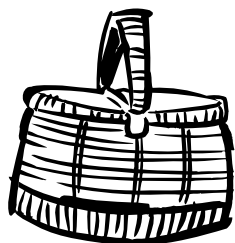
Events will include:

☞ Teacher Marie and her magical maypole;

☞ Ben Goldman and his wonderful musical notes; and

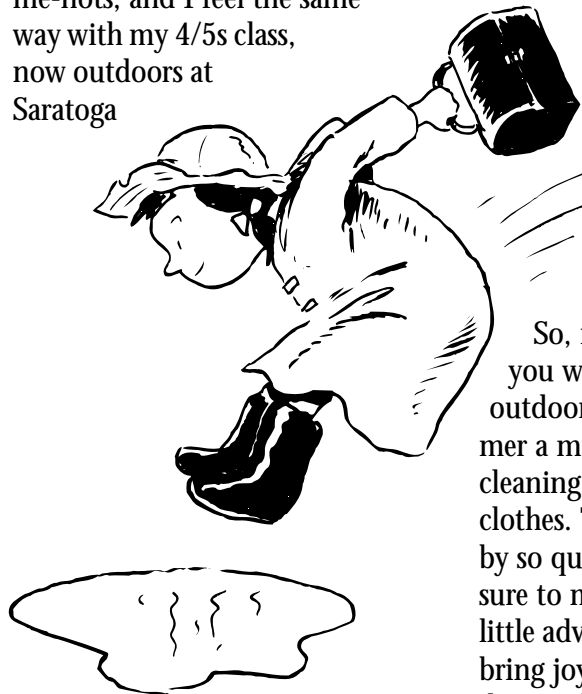
☞ Teacher Froggy, dressed as a gypsy, will tell the children stories of wonderment, and (with the help of a crystal ball) guide them on a treasure hunt!

As in the spirit of all Mountain School picnics, please bring a potluck dish to share (there will be no barbecuing), beverages, plates and utensils. Please also be sure to bring a ground cover to sit on, as we'll be picnicking on the lawn! ☺



(Enjoy the Great Outdoors, Continued)

recent rainy nights, she came wearing her yellow rubber boots and asked immediately to go and find some mud puddles. I was so happy to be outside with her looking for roly-polies, stomping in puddles and picking forget-me-nots, and I feel the same way with my 4/5s class, now outdoors at Saratoga



Springs. Watching the children's excitement as they collect bucketfuls of water striders and send leaves floating down the creek brings joy to my heart and the certainty that this is where children belong. I was thrilled with their bravery last week when we slid down a steep hill beyond the cooking tables. Even though a few tears were shed while speeding down the curvy part, everyone recovered during the slow runout at the bottom and wanted to do it again. I truly believe that when young children can spend plenty of unstructured time outdoors they grow in so many beneficial ways. Their confidence grows to climb over big rocks,

cross logs and negotiate the water in the creek. Being physically competent gives children great freedom to become the masters of their environment. As they play in the teepee, creating sandy concoctions for lunch and dinner,

they are practicing family life and enriching the powers of their imagination. At the end of the day, these same children will eat better and sleep better as well.

So, my hope is that each of you will make spending time outdoors this Spring and Summer a much higher priority than cleaning house or washing clothes. The hours and years fly by so quickly that we all must be sure to make time every day for a little adventure outdoors that will bring joy to us and to our children and create the living knowledge that we all need to become good caretakers of our earth. Enjoy the magical gifts of Mother Nature and pass them on.

Love,
Marie ☺

Upcoming Events

Please mark your calendars with all of the relevant events described below.

SPRING PICNIC SUNDAY, MAY 4

by Alex Cortes and Kari Wallick,
Social Chairs

The Spring Picnic is scheduled for 12:30 to 3:30 pm at the Schoolhouse. See article on page 4 for details.



SCRAPBOOK NIGHT FRIDAY, MAY 9

by Alex Cortes, Social Chair

You are invited to a Scrapbook Night on Friday, May 9, 6 pm to 12 am, at Scrapbook Mania 5415 Camden Avenue #C, San Jose, CA 95124. Phone: 408.267.4289.

This date was chosen because it will still give everyone one more night to complete their culmination projects. That night we can discuss establishing this on a more regular basis such as the 2nd Saturday of every month. In order for Scrapbook Mania to host a scrapbook night we need to have a minimum attendance of six people. The cost will be \$10 per person and each attendee will be responsible for payment

directly to Scrapbook Mania and their staff. The wonderful thing about the store is their free access to tools for all sorts of scrapbook needs (scissors, decorative punches, die cuts, etc.). Each evening will also include a "Make & Take" item courtesy of Scrapbook Mania's staff.

If you would like to attend, please email me with your RSVP so that I will have a head count to provide to the store. I will happily do this for our Mountain School Scrapping Nights! Due to the six-person minimum, it's important that you notify me if your plans change to prevent your attendance.

As always, food and drink are most welcome additions to any scrapping party!

I look forward to hearing back from any interested moms (and/or dads)!

TEACHER APPRECIATION PARTY FRIDAY, MAY 30

by Alex Cortes and Kari Wallick,
Social Chairs

It's time to relax and rejoice in a year well done! Come Celebrate Our Teachers at the Teacher Appreciation Party. Friday, May 30, 6:30 pm to 9:30 pm.

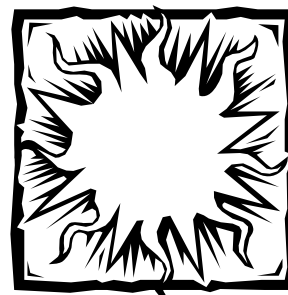
Join your friends and fellow parents, but leave the kids at home. Come toast our fabulous teachers and celebrate the unique learning experiences we've all shared this past year!

Please bring finger foods, salads, and/or desserts to share along

with your beverage of choice. This year our event is kindly hosted by:

*Brad and Janet Stimson
1257 Hanchett Avenue
San Jose, CA 95126
408.293.7338*

Look for flyers at your next circle meeting!



SUMMER SCHOOL JUNE 23 – JUNE 26, JULY 14 – 17

by Marie Imai, School Director

Sign up now for our new summer school camps at the little red schoolhouse. Two different 4-day sessions will be offered:

June 23 – 26, 9-12 am
and July 14 – 17, 9-12 am.

A parent needs to attend two out of the four days and the cost will be \$125 per week. The curriculum focus in June will be "bugs", and in July it will be "animal homes". Sign up with a friend as summer school is open to all children from age 2 ½ (by June) to pre-K (children who have already attended kindergarten are not eligible). Registration materials will be available at school. ☺

Kids Like to Start Small with Own Garden

by Associated Press

The following article was first printed in the Observatory in the February/March 1991 issue. References to books have been updated with current information.

Children take special delight in planting seeds and watching them grow.

“Nurturing plants from seed to harvest inevitably leads to increased feelings of confidence, self-esteem and pride,” says the National Gardening Association’s recently revised kids’ gardening guide. “One need only see the beaming face of a child who has harvested her first carrot to appreciate the value of this experience.”

However, adults should not impose their expectations on young gardeners. “Kids don’t care much about total yields,” the book says. “The experience of growing is as important as the end product.”

“The National Gardening Association Guide to Kids’ Gardening” by Lynn Ocone and Eve Pranis (February 1990, \$14.95) is the official youth gardening guide of the association, based in Burlington, VT.

Designed for parents, teachers and youth leaders, this 148-page book, first published in 1983, includes 70 gardening projects and related activities, primarily for children ages 6 to 14.

Kids can learn how to make a root-view box, build a home for a praying mantis and grow plants in a maze. They will learn how to dry flowers, make a plant press and brew solar mint tea.

Extensive gardening experience is not required. Each project has step-by-step instructions, and the book is filled with instructive drawings, diagrams and photographs.

Among the suggestions: Start small. It’s important that each young person have his or her own garden space, but it doesn’t have to be large.

Plant crops and varieties that are hardy and likely to be successful in your area. Some experimentation is fine, but you do want to ensure a measure of success. Don’t treat dead or diseased plants as failures; treat them as interesting opportunities to learn about plant needs, insects and weather.

The book provides instructions for setting up a youth garden including sample budgets, site development, tools, supplies and gardening tips.

Also of interest: “A Kids’ First book of Gardening: Growing Plants Indoors and Out” by Derek Fell (out of print) and “The Gardening Book” by Wes Porter (\$13.95), which comes with its own plastic greenhouse and starter tray. ∞

Farewell Mr. Rogers

by Jeanne Dominguez
Teacher Saturday 2s Class

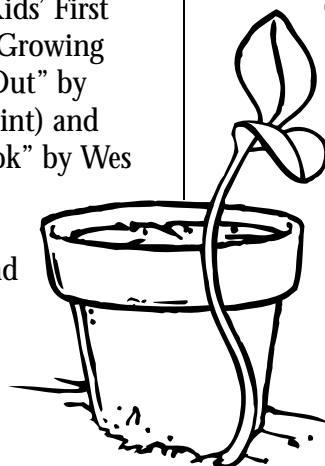
A couple months ago, Jeanne Dominguez e-mailed the school with the following snippets of wisdom from an article about the late “Mr. Rogers”. For those who didn’t receive the e-mail, I felt it was worth repeating.

He never shied from difficult subjects, once noting that he “wanted to give to the kids the sense... that whatever was human was mentionable, and whatever was mentionable was manageable.”

And...

His greatest comfort were visits to his grandfather, Fred McFeely.

“It was,” Rogers once recalled, “when I was leaving one time to go home after our time together that my grandfather said to me, ‘You know, you made this day a really special day. Just by being yourself. There’s only one person in the world like you. And I happen to like you just the way you are.’”



That just went right into my heart. And it never budged.” ∞

IGSONS On the Web

CUTE KID PICTURES

Have you captured some good Mountain School pictures of your children? Our website would benefit from some good candid photos of Mountain School children and teachers in action: holding bugs, climbing rocks, laughing, running, etc. If you have a picture that we can use for our website, please send it to our webmaster, Rod Crawford at:

Rod.Crawford@ardbeg.net.

Note: Please do not send pictures of children from other families, without permission from their parents. Thank you!

ALL-SCHOOL E-MAILS

Have you been receiving the all-school e-mails? If not, please notify Rod Crawford at:

Rod.Crawford@ardbeg.net. ☺

MemFox's Ten Read Aloud Commandments

by Children's Author Mem Fox
submitted by Teacher Jane Krejci



1. Spend at least ten wildly happy minutes every single day reading aloud.

3. Read at least three stories a day: it may be the same story three times. Children need to hear a thousand stories before they learn to read!

3. Read aloud with animation. Listen to your own voice and don't be dull, or flat, or boring. Hang loose and be loud, have fun and laugh a lot.

4. Read with joy and enjoyment: real enjoyment for yourself and great joy for the listeners.

5. Read the stories that the kids love over and over and over again, and always read in the same 'tune' for each book: i.e. with the same intonations on each page, each time.

6. Let children hear lots of language by talking to them constantly; or sing any old song that you can remember; or say nursery rhymes in a bouncy way; or be

noisy together doing clapping games.

7. Look for rhyme, rhythm or repetition in books for young children, and make sure the books are short!

8. Play games with the things that you and the child can see on the page, such as finding the letters that start the child's name and yours, remembering that it's never work; it's always a fabulous game.

9. Never ever teach reading, or get tense around books.

10. Read aloud every day because you just love being with your child, not because it's the right thing to do.

For more information about the author, see www.memfox.net. ☺



Science Project: Sock Walk

submitted by "Teacher Froggy"
(Carol-Lyn Davis), Saturday 3/4/5s

Children love this project! It is a tactile process from beginning to end, with interesting results.

What you will need:

- ☞ A long old sock
- ☞ Potting soil
- ☞ Long baking pan (9 x 13 in.)
- ☞ Newspaper
- ☞ Mister or spray bottle

Pull the sock over your shoes and leg of your pants. Go for a walk in an area overgrown with tall weeds and grasses. Vacant lots, parks

and roadsides are good places. Once home, carefully pull off the sock and look carefully at the seeds you picked up, using a magnifying glass to observe how the seeds attached themselves to the sock.

Next, fill the sock with damp potting soil. Wet the outside of the sock with a fine spray of water, and lay it in the baking pan. Fold up the newspaper and place it under one end of the pan to tip it slightly. Add a little water to the pan so the end of the toe of the sock can soak it up.

What happens? Plants will grow from the seeds you picked up on the sock. The plants will all be those with seeds that are dispersed by attaching to moving objects in order to cover a wider area to grow in. Plants have many different ways of dispersing their seeds. Dandelions, for example, are blown on the wind, and other seeds, such as those of the blackberry, are eaten by birds and excreted wherever the birds fly. ☞

(On Being the Mommy, continued)

That's what the books never told me. I was bound and determined to learn from the experts. It just took me a while to figure out who the experts were. ☞