



the PACIFIC PRIMARY SUN

FALL 2000



This newsletter is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Jamey O'Reilly. Jamey attended Pacific Primary from 1996-1999. We will always remember this kind and enthusiastic boy who so loved his friends, teachers and his school.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 - Letter From the Director
- 3 - Ballet & Blocks
- 3 - Coming Home
- 4 - Creatures Great and Small
- 5 - Three-Day "Magic"
- 6 - I Aim to Please
- 7 - Staff Matching Quiz
- 8 - Scholarship Endowment

OUR LOVE BOAT

By Anne Regenstein

On the first day of school this year, in addition to the welcoming smiles and warm greetings, were the adult hugs of support and the watery eyes acknowledging what a terribly sad time this was. Jamey O'Reilly, a boy as vibrant as his red hair, had died at the age of six after a yearlong illness.

Words do not do justice to the scope of this tragedy. But I hope my words will describe how our community revealed itself to be a bounty of love, care, tenderness, hope, and support. From the moment Jamey's mother, Breege, shared the terrible news, the staff and parents worked to the utmost for Breege and Jamey. Health care providers arranged Jamey's transfer to UCSF where he received personalized and excellent care, \$20,000 was raised for living expenses and alternative therapies, and meal and drivers were regularly provided. Elyse Jacobs lovingly tended Jamey with art therapy. This web of logistical and emotional support not only helped Jamey and Breege; it bound together those involved. Linda Burch said, "We knew we had to do it together, we took strength in each other." Jamey imagined himself piloting a love boat staffed by his friends, family and doctors.

The words: love, nurture, sensitive, were mentioned repeatedly in my discussions with people describing the community around Jamey. These words were echoed when I spoke with others who had lost loved ones while at Pacific Primary as they detailed the invaluable

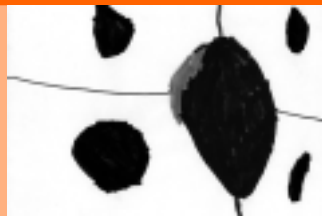
support and affection that they had received. This is exemplified by Belann's special weekend days with the children, the understanding staff who sensitively assessed the children's needs, and Elyse's art therapy that allows the children to explore their feelings and thoughts in a safe place. The love, kindness and practical assistance helped them get through their difficult days of grief and loss.

These difficult times reveal the strength and love of our community; the bonds of which are built daily through our participation with the school. As one parent remarked, "We're not joiners, the community becomes a natural part of your life." We are a diverse group whose cohesiveness lies in our shared values. Some of us were seeking community and rejoiced at discovering Pacific Primary. Others of us were so engrossed in our busy professional and family lives we did not realize the hole in our lives. But together we recognize what a treasure we have here.

In a society where one of the most popular television shows centers on voting people off an island, it is gratifying to know that by being part of Pacific Primary we show our children the value and benefits of being part of a nurturing community. As Nathaniel Bernstein (Coyote '99-'00) noted when his family received meals after the birth of his sister, "they bring us food because they love us."

Save this date!

March 3, 2001



Pacific Primary Auction

to be held at the Galleria

Letter from the Director

By Belann Giarretto

Meeting the needs of our young children by creating the best learning environment and developing a satisfying working place for our teachers continues to be the challenging work that faces our school and all good early childhood centers.

At the Board Retreat this year I outlined a five-year plan for the school. My highest priority is a plan that will strengthen the program for our children and improve job satisfaction for our staff. This plan includes reducing class size. A minimum reduction in each room will make a major improvement because it will make a difference for both the children and the teachers. Our excellent staff wants to meet the needs of each and every child in their classroom. Smaller classes will not only ensure closer involvement with each child it will also help retain our wonderful staff by increasing job satisfaction.

The Board supported the first step in my plan by approving the first enrollment reduction. Our total enrollment is now 79 instead of 80. The change reflects the reduction of one student from the Coyote class — now 21 children. We are hoping eventually to be able to reduce the size of all classes, ending up with a total school enrollment of 77. Funding will be accomplished in several ways, including using funds that will be available to the school once the endowment goal is complete.

Reducing class size is also needed to achieve my goal of gaining accreditation for the school by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Although we are fully compliant with licensing requirements from the State, accreditation is a different and more challenging standard. This thorough and rewarding process is designed to acknowledge high quality schools and facilitate real and lasting improvements in the quality of the program. Accreditation involves all aspects of the school and requires staff, parents, and the director to work together. I believe this process will strengthen our school, allowing us to reflect on our excellence and give us the framework to continue to grow and improve.

An important step in our continuing efforts to create a high-quality working environment for our teachers is the creation of a Classroom Support Teacher. This part-time position, filled by Laura Galvin, a Gray Whale afternoon teacher for three years, offers the teachers assistance three hours each week to meet the critical goals of observation, set-up and planning. The Center for the Child-Care Workforce deems that weekly planning and observation time are critical components for a high-quality work environment and our teachers certainly agree!

Despite the shortage of early childhood teachers, we were very successful this year filling openings with excellent, dedicated, and experienced teachers. Our new teachers were most impressed with our school.

We recently received two grants. The Peter and Miriam Haas fund has enabled us to renovate the adult bathroom and add needed storage. We can now buy art supplies in bulk! The McKesson Fund has allowed Dr. Zoe Grusky, our Pre-School Mental Health Consultant, to come to the school twice each month. She meets with parents and staff and is a great resource for our school.

Finally I want to note that our garden continues to add a "sense of wonder" to our outdoor experience. We recently had a small crop of grapes, figs, and apples. The children are learning about composting with Brian Silveira, Rainbow Dolphin Lead Teacher, and can be found raking and picking up leaves to add to our new compost bin.

I am truly energized and excited about working on these goals with the staff, parents, and the Board. This wonderful school will always be a place where growth and change are celebrated.



"This wonderful school will always be a place where growth and change are celebrated!"



Ballet & Blocks for Boys and Girls: Overcoming Gender Bias at School

by Chad Thomas (editorial and philosophical support, Nancy Anderman)

At lunch time two boys chant, “Boys don’t do ballet.” Outside, a group of girls in the playhouse shout, “We said girls only!” In the classroom, two teachers notice that only boys are playing with blocks.

Such situations are bound to happen at school. Children play and respond in such ways because it is part of the work they do to make sense of their world. The teachers’ job is to ensure that children can state their feelings about how they think things should be, while helping them confront the arbitrariness of their thinking about gender roles.

The school’s parent-teacher library contains a wonderful book, *The Anti-Bias Curriculum*. The authors list several goals for helping children learn about gender. The first reflects what the teachers at Pacific Primary try to do every day; to free children from constraining stereotypic definitions of gender role so that no aspects of development will be closed off simply because of a child’s sex.

What does this work look like in the classroom? When the boys were saying that boys don’t do ballet, the teacher let them finish speaking and then told them about a male rock and roll star who does ballet everyday. When the girls in the playhouse excluded boys from their play, the teacher had an impromptu meeting with all the girls and boys involved to resolve the conflict. And when teachers realized that only the boys in their room were playing with blocks — an important material for learning mathematics and science — they implemented a “Block Day” every week, when all the furniture in the room was pushed back and children could build with blocks anywhere they chose. This led to much more frequent block play by the girls in the room, without the boys feeling displaced.

The media gives young children limited, sexist definitions of who girls and boys are — and what they can do. Our job is to send children much different messages: that they are capable, all their interests are worth pursuing, and if someone tells them they can’t do something just because they are girls or boys, they should use their voices and tell them just how they feel about that!



Coming Home to Pacific Primary

by Brian Powers

We’ve been away for awhile, but Katie and I consider ourselves very lucky to be back at Pacific Primary. Our second child, Aidan, has joined the Sandpiper class. As returnees, we are not alone. Belann reports that of the 34 spaces available for incoming students this year, children in alumni families have filled 13.

For us, coming back is a genuine pleasure — and a relief. The school is obviously flourishing. It looks great. Countless initiatives draw on the energy and amazing organization of involved parents. The staff is clearly strong and motivated. The unique sense of mission remains intact and commitments to diversity and equity are admirably being

realized. While some important figures have moved on, many remain to provide continuity from the time we left in 1996. We are quickly learning about the vast talents, visions, and energies of people who have joined the staff since then.

In some ways, coming back is a *déjà vu*. It is wonderful, but we also have fewer stars in our eyes. We’ve been through preschool once already and have a sense of some of its surprises and challenges and delights. We also know, baseline, what Pacific Primary offers. We had to think this through, realizing over the past weeks that, with no lack of happiness and enthusiasm, we missed the feelings of awe and mystery with

Continues on page 8...

Creatures Great and Small *by Laura Galvin*



It may have officially been the Year of the Dragon, but in Pacific Primary classrooms, the year 2000 was the Year of the Chicken, Worm, Fish, and Snail. The children did a lot of visiting from class to class and got to know all the animals. Many of the animals went visiting too.

Sandpiper teacher Genee Ramsay explained that the eggs came first, thanks to connections at a lab. One Friday last spring, 24 eggs arrived in an incubator. What excitement as the eggs started hatching the following Monday and kept growing after that! About two weeks later, two yellow and two brown chicks stayed in the classroom, while the rest went to a family farm. Although the chicks were comfortable in their five-star cage, they sometimes roamed (and even flew a little) in a corral the Sandpipers built on their rug with big blocks and towels. The children got used to handling the chickens that even perched up on the children themselves. After several months the Sandpipers sadly said good-bye, as the chickens moved to join their siblings.

"I was a little scared, but I touched them. They tickle me." One Gray Whale spoke for many on the January day that nearly 500 nightcrawler worms were introduced into the classroom. The Gray Whales mixed a large worm habitat from topsoil, water, and newspaper that they shredded by hand. Before the worms were released into our garden six weeks later, the children really had adopted them as playmates, observing them, even finding babies in the soil, caring for them, and learning that they really weren't too scary at all.

"We learned a lot about salt water fish by living with them," said Brian Silveira, Rainbow Dolphin teacher. Last winter the new kids on the block in his classroom were swimming in a 60-gallon saltwater tank, donated by a Pacific Primary alumnus. "It was scary," said Brian. "I had to test the water all the time." The inhabitants of the tank have fared well. The original occupants of the tank, two clown fish, swim with eight colorful companions, including a box fish and a brittle star. The children have been inspired to develop a variety of water tests and experiments on their own. In addition, the tank has sparked interest in using books to learn more about fish and how to care for them.

Coyote teacher Shannon Snyder reported that the Snail Project grew from the children's interest in the snails in the school garden. From small, portable containers they eventually moved into a spacious habitat, approximately 20" x 36". Growing ivy and other plants, misted regularly by the children, it provided a homey atmosphere in which the Coyotes could actually see the snails courting and mating. Then they made predictions about how the little ones would grow. Roly-polies, millipedes, and other critters visited the snails. The children brought in many books and eagerly collected information about their animal guests. Spiral designs spontaneously appeared in the children's artwork.

And there's more....special mention should be made of the pond habitat in the Rainbow Dolphin room, with its newts, toads, aquatic snails, fiddler crab, and bullfrog tadpoles — that will take two years to change from tadpole to bullfrog. Fresh water aquariums flourish in the Gray Whale and Sandpiper rooms. The lively Gray Whale mice eat and run (on their wheel) day after day. And many caterpillars have emerged from cocoons nurtured in Pacific Primary classrooms, flying away as lovely butterflies.

Children gain a great deal from having animals in the classroom. Last year one Rainbow Dolphin was having a very hard time separating from his parents every morning. Finally his teachers discovered there could be a more comfortable good-bye if he held a frog. One day the boy told Brian, "I don't need to hold the frogs any more. I can play with my friends."

Classroom animals provide children with a very special focus of interest outside themselves. Here are creatures who eat, sleep, run, swim, pee, poop, make noises, etc. — things that children do, but that are so different from the children's own behavior. The animal kingdom is appealing to explore, and as children get close, things that seemed foreign and icky lose their scariness. Children welcome responsibility, and in regard to the animals, a chance to be the caregivers instead of the cared-for.

Classroom pets are an important part of the curriculum at Pacific Primary!

Three-Day “Magic”: A School-Wide Play in the Garden

by Laura Galvin

An audience of family members and friends of Pacific Primary enjoyed “three-day magic” last June 7 in the form of a performance of *The Empty Pot*, a Vietnamese folktale, directed by Heidi Tzortzis, Music and Movement teacher. For the first time, all Pacific Primary children participated in the production. “My goal,” said Heidi, “is to bring all the children of Pacific Primary together. This is what I have wanted to do all my life.”

The school’s own Children’s Garden, recently completed and decorated with paper lanterns, along with the new stage and surrounding areas, furnished the setting for the packed production, with dozens of musicians, dancers and actors. Children playing members of the Emperor’s Court paraded in, carrying banners and took up positions before the Emperor.

The story centers on the Emperor, who has no heir. He asks his court to bring him all the children in the land, each of whom is given some seeds. The child who would grow the best flower would become the next Emperor. Inspired, the young ones run to the garden and “plant” their seeds.

A year passes, season by season, marked by the performances of the musicians and dancers. Finally the children all return, each carrying a tall flower back to the Emperor. One pot is empty, though. It belongs to Ping, who cries over his misfortune, but finds comfort in his father’s words. “You did your best, and that is good enough.”

At the moment of truth everyone is amazed when the Emperor frowns at all the lovely flowers. The seeds the Emperor had given the children could never have grown, he told them. They had been boiled! The only honest child was Ping, who would become the next Emperor.

Heidi explained that she chose *The Empty Pot* for this school-wide production because, “I love the story. It’s so simple and so true. In a way, it’s shocking for the older children and good for the small ones. It gives them something to think about to help with the exploration of values.”

The whole project earned its name of “three-day magic” because all rehearsals took place over just three days. This was the first time that all the children in the school participated in the same production. Heidi’s dream of a school-wide play became a reality, winning over some skeptics who thought it couldn’t be done.

Speaking the view of many, one parent remarked, “I was amazed by this performance. I think it reflects Heidi’s incredible dedication, hard work, and vision.”

For her part, Heidi noted that collaboration and help from classroom teachers were vital to the success of *The Magic Pot*. The children were enthusiastic because the idea of being in a play appealed to them. They also had a choice of parts.

A once shy Coyote summed up the value of performing. “Actually, I’m not afraid any more. It’s fun to be on stage!”



I Aim To Please

By *Stephania Serena*



At back to school night Betty McMillian walked into the Coyote room to introduce herself and her new title “chef” and stating, “I am here to please the children! I cook what they like to eat!” I must admit this brief statement challenged what I choose to cook for my children. So much for all my prodding at dinnertime when I put something unfamiliar on the table. Betty’s warmth and her striking desire to please the many children that she has cooked for over the last 20 years at Pacific Primary are remarkable.

As a parent new to the school, still getting to know the ropes, I head to the kitchen to interview Betty. It felt like going to the core of the school. The kitchen is a bit warmer than the other rooms, with comforting smells wafting into the classrooms, tempting us all. I was surrounded by the essence of the community.

As Betty spoke she grated cheddar cheese for the classic meal of American childhood, macaroni and cheese. This is just one popular dish in her repertoire that nourishes the children and wins them over year after year.

As a child, Betty said, two women in her life cooked with the same affection and talent — her mother, Minnie and her godmother, Alice. They touched a chord with her, as they aimed to please her. She remembered watching them prepare food and fondly recalled being inspired by them. With three grown children of her own, she has plenty of home-cooking experience.

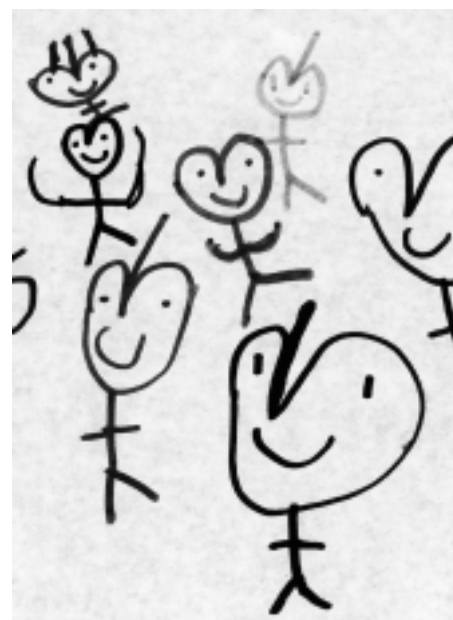
Betty began at Pacific Primary in 1979 as the substitute of then chef, Ritha Green. When Ritha moved on in 1980, founding director Mary Bodo begged, indeed, pleaded with her to head up the kitchen. Betty accepted, wondering, “Can I really do this?” With no handbook, she faced the challenge of estimating how much food to prepare. How much rice to cook for more than 80 children? “I just did it by trial and error”, Betty remarked.

Children at Pacific Primary quickly learn where the kitchen is and who prepares their food. On any given day, Betty will see a small figure in the kitchen doorway and hear, “Betty, I am hungry”, or a child identifying the

smell coming from the oven, or a child putting in a request for a special meal. One boy asked in great detail for his favorite — baked chicken, mashed potatoes, string beans — and gravy, no less. After lunch children visit the kitchen to offer their “thank-yous”.

Betty is responsible for happy tummies and congenial lunchtimes where children and adults can chat and share a meal together. Betty’s warmth and skill are at the center, the hearth, of the school. A hearth’s definition encompasses the floor of a fireplace or a center of a home, as well as the vital or creative center of a place. Betty has brought Pacific Primary’s hearth to life. The kitchen has become an unofficial teachers lounge. A relaxed spot for anyone passing by to grab a cracker and take a break. Often, teachers come by for a kaffeeklatsch. Her colleagues claim Betty knows everything going on at the school. She recently counted an unnamed faculty member dropping by seven times in one day! Loved by all, no one can get enough of Betty — or her cooking.

PS: Betty is taking requests. She wants to know your children’s favorite meals at home — not yours. Please feel free to stop in and let her know what they are.



Natalie 9/8/00

Pacific Primary Staff Matching Quiz

Are you a long time Pacific Primary parent or are you new to the school? Do you think you know the Pacific Primary teachers and staff well? Test your knowledge in the fun matching quiz below. You may be surprised! Answers below.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. BELANN | A. I love to sing and I had hippie parents. |
| 2. MARYANN | B. I can ride a unicycle. |
| 3. JOHN | C. I was born on a train in France and was named after the designer of the scarf my mother was wearing at the time. |
| 4. SAUL | D. I had three sons at Pacific Primary and served as Board treasurer before joining the staff. |
| 5. SPRING | E. I danced at President Kennedy's inaugural ball and I still have the dress I wore (even if it no longer fits!). |
| 6. BRIAN | F. As children, my friends and I loved to play "kick the can" in the flower covered cemetery behind my house. |
| 7. ROXIE | G. I walk one to three miles with my husband each morning. |
| 8. ALANA | H. As children, my friend and I tied boys to a tree and threatened to bombard them with tennis balls. |
| 9. NANCY | I. My father invented the first electric toothbrush; however, there was no interest so he let the patent expire. |
| 10. HELEN | J. I try to be nice to everybody; it's just my personality. |
| 11. HEIDI | K. Elvis Presley winked at me at my Ear, Nose and Throat doctor's office in Beverly Hills. |
| 12. SHANNON | L. I once placed an ad for a roommate with a referral agency, and found the love of my life! |
| 13. CHAD | M. I dream of learning to surf and designing a full body mural tattoo. |
| 14. YUSEF | N. I collect antique toasters (antique cars take up too much room). |
| 15. ELYSE | O. I have ridden coast to coast three times on a 1978 BMW motor cycle (currently for sale). |
| 16. MAHROUSHKA | P. I like horseback riding. |
| 17. SARAH | Q. I didn't walk until I was 18 months old and wore leg braces as a child. |
| 18. AISLING | R. My claim to 15 minutes of fame occurred as a teenager hanging out in Andy Warhol's factory. |
| 19. BETTY | S. I love bad T.V. and live for my nightly fix of "Family Feud". |
| 20. CHERIE | T. Armistead Maupin once stopped me on the street to compliment my acting skills; he had seen me in several local productions. |
| 21. LAURA | U. I have won gold, silver and bronze medals in national swimming competitions. |
| 22. GENE | V. I was an elf on a children's TV program. |



ANSWERS

11, 2 D, 3 T, 4 O, 5 A, 6 B, 7 P, 8 N, 9 K, 10 G, 11 H, 12 F, 13 S, 14 Q, 15 R, 16 C, 17 V, 18 U, 19 J, 20 M, 21 E, 22 L

ROOM PARENTS

Sandpipers
Supriya Shivakumar
Shelly Schaenen

Gray Whales
Kathy Kelly
Shelly Reingold
Janan New

Rainbow Dolphins
Tamara Avery
Kate Kendall

Coyotes
Claire Alexander
Tracey Chambers

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2000-2001

Linda Burch, *President*
Renee Otero, *Vice President*
Michael Sui, *Treasurer*
Harold Bernstein, *Secretary*
Dwight Alexander
Rebecca Calahan-Klein
Lori Carstens
Karen Dell
Chieko Murasugi
Michelle Meyer
Lorne Morrison
Janan New
Anne Regenstein
Doug Tom
Bill Weihl

CREDITS

Contributors
Brian Powers, *Editor*
Nancy Anderman
Brian Powers
Karen Dell
Laura Galvin
Belann Giarretto
Janan New
Anne Regenstein
Stephania Serena
Chad Thomas

Photography
Gilbert Robinson

Design & Layout
Claire Alexander
Stephania Serena

Coming Home... continued from page 3

which we approached the adventure here when our daughter came in 1994.

It's not the school, of course, but we who have changed. We're more chiselled by parenting, more down to earth in our expectations, and more savvy (we hope) about how kids develop and what schools can do. But with the perspective of public school parents and veterans of the child care crisis out there; we don't take a thing for granted at Pacific Primary. We are grateful to come home, to an oasis that we will repose at for at least two years, before, alas we head out again, into a world less clearly dedicated to principles of equity, mutuality, and respect, more pragmatic and, unfortunately, full of expectations that we and our children comply with less than perfect programs.

Though we are not starry-eyed, we are nevertheless amazed at the detailed knowledge that the Sandpiper teachers already have compiled on Aidan, and the way they use it in organizing his days. We are thrilled to hear him working at remembering song lyrics or reenacting stories heard at school. He is

already showing signs of the found-object artist that Pacific Primary kids become. We have been able to conjure up a sense of awe for the culture of respect and affection that prevails, where everyone is treated with dignity and their special qualities are sought out and honored. We have truly never seen such consideration anywhere else. Even when members of the community have differences of opinion, this is a place where no one-- kids, teachers, parents, and other staff-- takes anyone for granted. We envy those who get to stay.



Scholarship Endowment Challenge

We are more than half way to our goal of creating a \$500,000 endowment fund, the proceeds of which will be used to support scholarships at Pacific Primary. Three years after its inception, thanks to generous donations from Pacific Primary alumni and parents, the balance in the endowment fund now stands at \$308,000. We are well within reach of meeting the \$500,000 goal by December 2002 and ensuring that Pacific Primary remains an affordable, accessible and diverse learning environment into the future.

Helping to propel us toward that goal, is the \$100,000 challenge grant we received last year from a Pacific Primary alumnus family. Their pledge will match every dollar in new funds raised for the Scholarship Endowment with a 59-cent donation, to a maximum of \$100,000. If we raise \$128,500 in new funds, their matching donation will contribute the balance of our goal. This year, we hope that many more Pacific Primary alumni and parents will be inspired to join us in benefiting from this remarkable opportunity. If you

would like to learn more about the Scholarship Endowment Campaign and help us make this dream a reality, please contact Belann Giarretto at (415) 346-0906.

