

Pacific Primary Sun



—inspiring a love of learning, creating and caring

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The Story of a Great Tree and Its House | Sarah Borruso

My son Luca was drawn to it like a magnet on his first trip to Pacific Primary in the summer of 2015. There it stood in the far northeast corner of the Yellow Sun School playground with its great limbs stretching out in every direction as if it were saying: “Come on up, climb me, take a look from my highest point!” Luca gave it a try, and I started wondering about its story. Soon I began to understand how this sprawling, stoic tree is more than just a play spot. Soon I began to appreciate how beautifully the tree offers itself as a symbol of the many lessons the children are learning at Pacific Primary every day.

With dainty, dusty green leaves at the ends of its highest branches and strong curling limbs at its base, this tree is aptly named a twisted tea tree (or *leptospermum laevigatum*). Although the exact date of its planting is unknown, one might guess - based on its near 30 foot height - that it was a mere sapling when Pacific Primary opened its doors in 1974. Alumnus Colin Turner, 1981-1984, recalls spending hours climbing up and down the tree as a kid. His memories are vivid, tactile: “What I most remember are the textures, the feeling of the bark on my hands, and the silvery-green color of the almond-shaped leaves.”

Today the tree also hosts a tree house, built in 2005 by Jim Pohl, father of two students and a film industry set designer. The tree house brought with it new ways to explore and play. Colin’s daughter, Charlotte, a current Rainbow Dolphin, now has the opportunity of climbing the tree her father climbed: “I think Charlotte’s experience is great, because the kids have an incredible structure to climb and play on, with all kinds of secret places to hide and do make believe. But I think climbing the tree itself will always be the same,” says Colin.

Indeed, the new tree house is incredible, featuring a climbing wall, rope bridge, and pulley system. These features are popular because they require the children to use their whole body. In addition, the tree features a kitchen area under the tree house that offers many opportunities for all kinds of dramatic play. It is a one-stop, anything-goes kind of play area. All the



children can play on it at the same time, younger ones learning from the older ones.

“The tree house offers wonderful moments of uninterrupted play,” says Sandpiper Teacher Eric Wilson, who has been teaching at Pacific Primary since 2002. “Ever since it was built, it has always been a crowd favorite.” And through play in the tree and its house - pirates, cooking, animal play, etc. - children are offered myriad lessons in “conversation skills, gross motor skills, risk-taking, dramatic play, social-emotional opportunities, self-regulation, and spatial awareness,” says Eric.

Beyond the seemingly endless fun and opportunity for camaraderie this tree offers, while researching its story I found that it’s also a powerful symbol that reveals many poetic lessons. With its strength, the tree speaks of - indeed teaches - endurance, trust, friendship, balance, perspective, a love of nature and peace, and patience. It is a steady, sturdy friend to all who want to lean on it; an inspiring lookout tower to all who want to see out from it; and a quiet, calm force for all who want to rest under it.

The preschool years may be the most important time of learning we ever have. What preschool teachers do is arguably more important than what occurs in the elementary school... Ultimately, exploration and play during preschool turns us into adults who are flexible and sophisticated thinkers. --Alison Gopnik, Professor of Psychology, UC Berkeley, *The Philosophical Baby - What Children's Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love and the Meaning of Life* (2009)

After 41 years, we are delighted that Pacific Primary still feels the same to our alumni. Despite making changes to our program and weathering the dramatic changes in our city, we have stayed true to our mission to create an experience for each child filled with curiosity, creativity, and connection. It is wonderful to hear Kris O'Donnell, a Founder, weekly volunteer, and substitute, confirm that we are maintaining the original vision of the school.

What has stayed the same: There's hard evidence that children learn more through play than they would in academic settings, and that hands-on learning is the most important way that children learn. This is our curriculum: play, sand, water, play dough, fun, art, music, movement, literacy, discovery, field trips, and love.

What has changed: We've added emergent curriculum, which supports cognitive growth by deep exploration but is always hands-on and appropriate. We've also refined our focus on emotional and social growth and sensory motor integration.

An exciting change is greater collaboration among the teachers. Brian Silveira, Polar Bear Lead Teacher, and Nadia Jaboneta, Coyote Lead Teacher, are nationally known trainers. They recently created a Community of Practice (COP) for all of our teachers. We meet monthly and share best practices while learning from each other.

As a Preschool for All site, we have been deemed a high quality program. Our educational philosophy of play-based learning is helping children develop a flexible personality that sees problems as solvable, welcomes difference, and is able to handle change. Being in a diverse environment is essential to this goal, and we continue to build and expand our diverse community.

Pacific Primary was created to preserve the right of children to have a "childhood." As many as 41 years later we continue our work to protect and honor that right.



Belann



Lynn



The longevity and dedication of the teachers at Pacific Primary remains one of the school's special qualities. As we reflect on special staff anniversaries this year (see box), we offer this alumni teacher profile.

Laura Galvin spent 14 years at Pacific Primary from 1996-2010 as a teacher and program facilitator. She was instrumental in the development and integration of an emergent curriculum. Laura retired from Pacific Primary at age 72, but she continues to share her time and energy as a volunteer tutor for the Reading Partners program and a children's walk guide at the San Francisco Botanical Garden.

I gained an awareness of the awesome competence of children at Pacific Primary.

With inspiration from Reggio Emilia, emergent curriculum and the project approach became mainstays of life at Pacific Primary while I was there. This allowed children to

focus on sophisticated topics of interest to them. "Short attention span" doesn't exist when children are truly involved in a topic.

*Some of my favorites include **The Bone Project**, a study of the names of human bones and comparing them to animal bones; **The Tool Project**, learning about the tools and techniques used in shoeing a horse (thanks, Lynn!); **The Bread Project**, figuring out why one bread machine worked and another didn't when we used the same instructions; and **The Jury Project**, which included a classroom trial with a split decision and a courtroom visit hosted by a judge who let the children sit in the seats of the trial participants. While dissecting owl pellets (a piece of evidence), one child looked up with shining eyes and announced, "I'm going to be a scientist!"*

Belann was an inspiring and patient mentor. Among her most useful bits of advice were, "Start with the emotion the child is feeling," and "You may not be able to change a child's behavior, but you can change your own behavior." It was so gratifying to be a teacher in this environment. I learned a great deal from Belann, Lynn, my colleagues, the families, and the children of Pacific Primary. Best of all, I had an enormous amount of fun!

STAFF ANNIVERSARIES

Thank you for your years of service to Pacific Primary!

Elyse Jacobs Expressive Arts
Founder and Specialist, 30 Years

Belann Giarretto Director, 20 Years

Brian Silveira Polar Bear Lead Teacher /
Senior Lead Teacher, 19 Years

Mahroushka Papazian Gray Whale
Lead Teacher, 18 Years



Congratulations to Mahroushka Papazian, Gray Whale Lead, and Gaurav Narasimhan. They were married last August at Muir Beach and then had a second wedding ceremony in India over winter break. Best wishes to you!

Affordable Housing for Teachers and Staff

| Johanna Metzgar

Affordable housing for teachers and other staff remains one of the biggest threats to Pacific Primary and all San Francisco schools. "Teachers are our greatest asset," says Belann Giarretto, Pacific Primary's Executive Director, "and we have to find ways to support them."

Belann testified at City Hall in March 2016 on the teacher housing crisis. In front of city officials, she explained that teachers are driving to work from as far away as Antioch, Vacaville, and Fairfield. One teacher leaves her house at 3:30 a.m. just to arrive on time to work. Pacific Primary offers competitive salaries, but paying a living wage is out of range for most schools given current housing prices. Belann explained that in the past the school would have at least ten competitive applications for a lead teacher position. "This year," she said, "we put out a call for applications and had zero responses. I've been here 20 years and have always had a great selection of candidates. This is very disturbing and unusual." The hearing resulted in the passage of legislation, fostered by Dean Preston, Pacific Primary parent and tenant rights advocate, that protects teachers from being evicted during the school year. While this provides relief, it doesn't stop evictions or solve the underlying affordability issue.

To mitigate the effects of the housing crisis in San Francisco, Pacific Primary has started a fund to assist its teachers. At last year's auction, the school raised approximately \$18,000 for emergency housing, last month's deposit, moving costs, and legal fees. But the fund cannot aid with month-to-month rent. Like the new eviction legislation, this fund helps with emergencies, while the long-term problem of affordability remains.

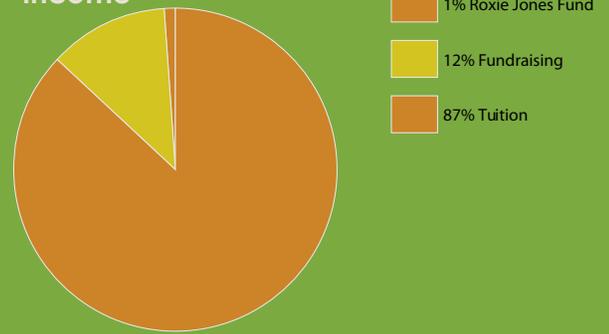
The school is now also turning to its community of alumni and supporters who may have apartments, in-law units, or rooms for rent. Offering housing to a teacher at below market rates is a deductible, in-kind donation to the school. In fact, it is one of the most generous and impactful gifts the school can receive.

If you would like to contribute to the emergency housing fund or offer a below market rental, please contact Belann.

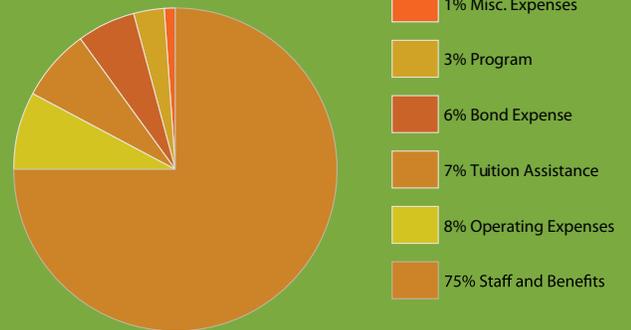


Financial Snapshot

Income



Expenses



As the cost of living in San Francisco rises, we are committed to investing in our greatest asset, our staff, while keeping other expenses as low as possible. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to Pacific Primary's fundraising efforts to keep our school running in line with our mission and values and allowing our music, expressive arts, and summer program to thrive.

The board is actively working on transforming our financial model to ensure our school's vitality and ongoing financial security. Please look for communication in the coming months with details on this exciting endeavor.



Vishal Tayal, Board Co-President



Congratulations, Belann

This year you celebrate your twentieth anniversary of leadership as the Executive Director of Pacific Primary.

You are a tireless champion of the school’s founding mission; of its teachers, understanding the critical role they play in any educational program; of expanding the welcoming of LGBT families into the school; and of addressing socio-economic diversity. Your achievements, Belann, are momentous and far-reaching for our school and for progressive early childhood education in San Francisco.

On March 5, 2016, you were recognized and commended by Assembly Member Philip Ting of the 19th District “For your visionary role in guiding the development of this outstanding school to its current preeminence.”

Congratulations, Belann! Thank you for your hard and sweet work, from the sandbox to City Hall.





Congratulations, Elyse

Brava, Elyse! Congratulations on your thirtieth year as our Expressive Arts Specialist! You not only created this innovative and dynamic program but have inspired and mentored other teachers to take on your work.

Your program gives children another vital language to express their emotions and feelings through art. Generations of Pacific Primary graduates have creativity based on “loose parts” that allows them to combine many recycled materials to realize their imagination. They see the potential of a toilet paper roll and have a myriad of ways to utilize this in their art.

This creative ability is a lifelong gift. We are so fortunate to have had your beautiful and creative energy enrich our schools!





This Little Light of Mine | Ann Kim

The familiar sound of “This Little Light of Mine” fills the blocks around Pacific Primary as the children march in the school’s annual Peace Parade in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday on January 15th. The event has served as a beacon of inspiration for the school community for over twenty years.

In the weeks before the parade, teachers discuss what peace means with their students, who Dr. King was, and how he was both powerful and peaceful. “We try to make it meaningful for the kids,” says Executive Director Belann Giarretto. “We want it to be memorable and inspiring, and not just a one-day event.”

Each classroom prepares for the parade by making signs to carry in the parade and decorating pictures of Dr. King. The simplicity and power of the message of peace and the way children make it concrete are reflected in their descriptions. “They understand what peace is through their own behavior, positive or negative,” says Yellow Sun School Director, Lynn Turner. “It’s real life to them. You will hear the children say things like, ‘Peace is no biting,’ ‘Peace is sharing your toy,’ ‘Peace is being kind and helping my friend find her stuffy.’”

After the parade, the children gather for a story about Dr. King that emphasizes how he was a child who had a family and went to school, just like them. The teachers purposely avoid any discussion of racism or his death. The children also listen to an excerpt of Dr. King’s

I Have a Dream speech before moving to celebrate his birthday in the same way they celebrate their own - with popsicles.

Pacific Primary children are empowered by what they learn months before and after the peace parade. Teachers reference Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. all year. “When there is a problem we ask the children, ‘What would Dr. King do?’” says Lynn. “It’s amazing how powerful children feel when they have solved issues in a strong and peaceful way, like Dr. King did.”

During this year’s parade, Panda teacher Kelly Fox hosted her friend Anthony Butler, who works at a high school in San Jose. He was struck by how four-year-old children are learning about being fair, kind, and helping others while his own school struggles to do the same with teenagers. He plans to send some of his students to the parade in 2017 as part of a community project.

“The most touching part of the morning took place at the conclusion of the speech, as I stood next to this elderly lady who I did not know,” Butler later wrote on Facebook. “We looked at each other, and she said to me with tears in her eyes, ‘...Still moves me to this day!’ (referring to the speech). Thank you Kelly Fox and Pacific Primary for reminding me how simple Dr. King’s message was, and thank you for letting me witness you passing on this message to the next generation.”

The Mule

A group of children are playing with puppets, and one child is throwing them high into the air repeatedly. Elyse, the Expressive Arts Specialist, asks him to find other ways to play with the puppets. The boy ignores her, and Elyse asks him again if he has heard her words.

Just then, another boy whispers to Elyse, "You forgot something," and points to the mule poster in the classroom. Elyse sits down with the puppet-throwing boy, and they identify their respective place on the poster.

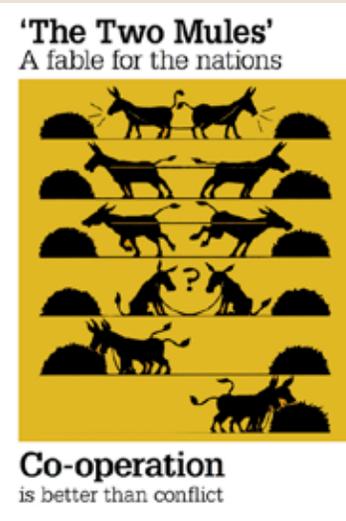
The puppet-throwing boy points to the nearest mule, "That's me."

"And that's me pulling at you to listen and stop throwing puppets," says Elyse and continues to point back and forth going down the poster: "My idea, your idea, my idea, your idea."

The second boy, who confidently helps coach a peaceful resolution, asks, "How do you want to share?"

Elyse responds: "What if you picked up any puppets left on the floor and tried to toss them into the large woven basket that is their home?"

"Yeah!" says the boy, and he tosses the puppets into the basket. "We found a solution that works for everyone!"



The Wedding

Brian Silveira, Polar Bear Lead, married his long time partner, Jay Dayrit, last fall. They recently returned from their honeymoon in Portugal. The Polar Bears were brimming with advice and "catulations."



"I love you, and I think that you can have a wonderful wedding party. I hope you will be the same because sometimes when you get a wedding you're different like some people cut their hair. It's okay to marry another boy like you Brian." - Anu

"Go on trips with each other, and go out to dinner with each other. I wish for your house to be clean whenever you want it to be clean." - Lilly

"If you have a problem try to solve it by using the 'trash can' - use the little one, medium one, or big one to throw things away or by using your words and listening." - Emma

"How about a happy wedding song? Happy, happy, happy! Wedding, wedding, wedding! Happy wedding, happy wedding, happy wedding, we love you!" - Dash



POLAR BEARS • The Polar Bears are exploring many aspects of the human body. The children have measured their own bodies and compared the measurements to other things like flowers. Parents who work in science and medicine have visited the classroom as experts and helped explore animal skulls and even a full size human skeleton. The Polar Bears have also traced and painted life-sized body images with accurate skin color shades. They have learned about foods that are good for their bodies and continue to explore self-regulation of their own emotions and energy by taking cues from their bodies!



PANDAS • The theme of collaboration in the classroom arose one day when the Pandas completed a 200-piece puzzle. One of the Panda teachers wrote a song called “Collaboration Station,” in the vein of “Schoolhouse Rock.” The children are also learning about symbiosis in animals and studying pairs in nature that help each other such as the zebra and oxpecker, moray eel and cleaner shrimp, and the bees and trees right in their own schoolyard!



PRAIRIE DOGS • The Prairie Dogs are dictating their own stories which become the basis for “story plays.” The children act out these “story plays” during circle time or in smaller groups. Storytelling helps the children reflect on their own feelings, develops empathy, and strengthens connections in the classroom. Acting out the stories shows respect for the children by bringing their stories to life while also providing a safe forum for exploring ideas and concerns while working together with teachers and peers.



PENGUINS • The Penguins have expressed an interest in nature through their exploration in the garden. They look at insects, flowers, rocks, and the hummingbirds that frequent the little green space. The children explore the smells, colors, and textures of the garden by using all of their senses. Activities include planting grass, field trips to nature spaces that offer climbing low tree branches, building with sticks, and going on hikes. The teachers bring nature into the classroom to stimulate the children’s imagination and as a medium of inventiveness in their play.



COYOTES • Coyotes are deeply engaged in using blocks, magna-tiles, and loose parts. They use the materials in innovative ways with amazing communication and teamwork. They undertake complicated sorting, positioning, trajectory, enclosing, enveloping, and transporting towards a variety of fascinating results. The children examine photos of their schema work with a teacher, a peer and with family members. Together, they have learned that schema is everywhere!



RAINBOW DOLPHINS • Rainbow Dolphins are really interested in hospitals and what happens inside a hospital. They took a trip to a pet hospital and a children’s hospital where a parent works. There is also a hospital in the classroom where the children have been busy giving shots, fixing owies, having a cough, being pregnant, and taking care of babies.



GRAY WHALES • The Gray Whales are focusing on adventures that they have with their families. The dramatic play area of the classroom reflects those adventures, such as camping and going to the park. The Gray Whales are also learning sign language, and the children are amazing at remembering different signs that represent various foods at meal times. They learn a sign a day and constantly ask for more!



SANDPIPERS • Sandpipers are doing play around space, rockets, the earth, and anything connected. This started from the story *Not a Box*, by Antoinette Portis, which concludes with a picture of a rabbit in a box imagining that it is a rocket ship. After hearing that story, the Sandpipers made their own rocket ships by using boxes and other materials. During rest time, the children listen to stories about space and space meditation sounds.

PACIFIC PRIMARY 2015-2016 TEACHERS & STAFF

executive & OSS director | belann giarretto • **YSS director** | lynn turner • **finance director** | amie haiz
• **business & operations** | shannon rice • **administrative assistant** | chris dutcher

OSS • **penguins** | saeda fuller (lead) • dylan turner • cristina taratchila • **prairie dogs** | leanne foley (lead) • lisa koester • jane kolb • hector rivera • **pandas** | kelly fox (lead) • alyssa chazen-richards • evelyn cobb • **polar bears** | brian silveira (lead) • sarah cleary • sabine scherer

YSS • **sandpipers** | eric wilson (lead) • hanna alemayehu • shante jones • **gray whales** | mahroushka papazian (lead) • keiko shimozaki • anna vongvixay • haruka yamaguchi • **rainbow dolphins** | lucia johnson (lead) • soara delouvre • randy johnson • **coyotes** | nadia jaloneta (lead) • riley graham • darby hillyard

music & movement | kevin gerzevitz • susan kessey • **expressive arts** | elyse jacobs • connie huang • **support teacher** | sean o'connor • ben tursi • **sunroom coordinator** | sabrina brewer • maria guziak • **sunroom afternoon teacher** | sean o'connor • ashley ellington • **afternoon supervisor/support teacher** | krissi lewis • gresha wallace • **chef** | amy fernandez • travis wright • **alternate teachers** | cameron shaw • sarah watkins • **parking coordinator** | doug diboll



Pacific Primary completed its fortieth year as a preeminent early education institution in San Francisco. For half of the school's life, Belann Giarretto has been our leader. She, the teachers, and staff have remained committed to supporting working families in San Francisco, to creating an intentionally diverse community, and to creating engaging emergent curriculum.

When I think back 40 years ago, our city was a very different place. Kids could play unsupervised on their blocks. Playgrounds were wooden structures that we could climb on, and maybe fall from. Parents didn't register us for daily extra-curricular activities; we created our own imaginary games. In our house, *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers* were almost all the screen time that we were granted.

Today in a world where our children can be over-scheduled and bombarded with technology, Pacific Primary remains steadfast in its belief of preserving their childhood. Teachers encourage students to get dirty by digging in the garden and stomping through puddles. Teachers and staff honor our children's voices by listening. Whether it's changing bathroom signs to be more inclusive and gender-neutral or creating puppets with painters tape and found objects, our children engage in play and exploration. They also begin to understand that they can make a difference in the world by exploration and by suggesting and making changes in their school. They learn to respect others by checking in with each other when a conflict arises. They practice mindfulness by learning to calm themselves by utilizing the Peace Place. Through this they can imagine a world of peace, love and respect.

We are so fortunate to be a part of this important and intentional community.

Thank you to the leaders in the classrooms and throughout the school.

Thank you to Elyse for her 30 years of encouraging our children to think outside of the box.

Thank you to Belann for her 20 years of leadership and commitment to early education and our children.

Thank you for encouraging the leaders of tomorrow to blossom and grow.



Mare Managan



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