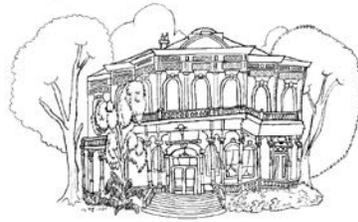


# NEWS



# NOTES

SUMMER 2015

## JIM BENZ ON PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, schools in America were places of mass education, where children, seated at desks for hours at a time, were expected to memorize facts and formulas and practice penmanship. Teachers were trained to follow textbooks of lessons, hold students to strict routines and reward them for compliant behavior. Even art classes were meant to train children to copy patterns, essential for work in textile plants. At the same time, a nascent movement in education that had an opposing and revolutionary view of children and schools, appealed to a young transplant to California – Josephine Duveneck.

In 1925, the ideals of fearless thinkers such as Francis Parker, John Dewey and Maria Montessori inspired Josephine Duveneck and a small group of parents to search for a school where learning was joyful and exciting, where children could learn by doing, and where both independence and group cooperation were valued. Unable to find one that suited them, they started “Peninsula School for Creative Education,” one of the first progressive schools in California. Those ideals, deceptively simple and intuitive to us today, have endured as guiding principles for the school across the past 90 years and continue to influence the progressive education movement in America.

Francis Parker is recognized as one of the first thinkers to apply progressive ideals, popular at the end of the 1800’s, to education. He believed that schools should teach with the whole child in mind – physical, social, emotional, and cognitive – and he promoted

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## 40 YEARS OF REFLECTION

by Graceann Johnson

PENINSULA SCHOOL: MY HOME away from home. Literally. The first glimpse I had of the Big Building, nestled under its great trees, still glows in my mind after 40 years. I was touring “alternative schools” back in the 70s, looking for the best place for our children. I entered the driveway and *wham!* That was it. I just gasped and said, “I love it already!” When I came home later that day, my husband Bob said I looked so excited I was nearly levitating.

We lived in Millbrae at the time and we loved the co-op nursery school, but were disheartened by the local public schools. When I brought Bob back for his visit, our love affair with Peninsula School was sealed. We bought our first tiny house nearby and held our breath waiting to hear if Corey and Antone would be

*Continued on page 2*

## “TU-TU” WONDERFUL

by Chris Titus Vale

*“When I began student teaching, I was staying with a family that had a small farm. My supervising teacher asked me to be in charge of a writing assignment for the next day. I brought in one of the chickens. The kids were delighted. We discussed how it moved around, how the feathers were so colorful, and much more about traits and characteristics. They made drawings, and wrote and dictated stories. Afterwards, my supervising teacher said we needed to ‘get back to work.’ I dreamed of teaching at a school where the chicken IS the work.”*

So began the odyssey that would be known as “Josie’s Class”.

Born in Chicago, raised in Wilmette, IL, educated in Michigan, Massachusetts, California and India, Josie will attest to having a calling for teaching young children. She and her sister Izzy attended the same elementary school in Wilmette and “...when I was in the 4th grade she was in Kindergarten and she cried every day when our mom dropped her off. The teachers often let me go into her classroom to comfort her and that is when I decided, I want to teach K-1”.

Carol Young-Holt, Peninsula Director when Josie was hired, remembers, “Josie was

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JIM BENZ

*Continued from page 1*

the idea that children were capable of complex, independent thinking. Slightly later, John Dewey's propositions that children should be active participants in their education, not simply vessels to be filled with discreet information, that schools should act as models of a democratic society, and that schools should fulfill a social good resonated with the growing progressive movement. Finally, working in Italy, Maria Montessori's work recognized each child as an individual and she advocated for providing children with greater independence and the freedom to choose activities in their days.

activities such as organized and child-created sports games and in unstructured time to play in our lovingly preserved and abundant play areas. By providing children with choice for activities and independence for how they use their free time, Peninsula actively promotes reflection, so important for intellectual and creative growth, and bolsters the child's sense of his or her self.

Living in a diverse and democratic society requires, at its most basic level, a respect and compassion for others. Josephine Duveneck recognized that this postulate should be the very foundation on which everything rests for a new school. Today at Peninsula, the skills needed to be an active member of a community are infused into every nook and cranny

of WWII. "Intolerance is too costly for any of us," Josephine once said. Peninsula continues the Duveneck family commitment to equity and social justice. Students initiate fund-raising campaigns for people around the world who have been affected by strife; we have a commitment to providing our staff with equity training so that we can remain more aware of our curriculum and the needs of all students; teachers lead discussions with students on topics of equity and justice; and the school continues its commitment to maintaining a generous financial aid program, which creates opportunities for a broad array of families to send their children to Peninsula School.

The simple and intuitive yet profoundly challenging principles that became the foundation for Peninsula School grew out of the ideals of the progressive education movement and the personal values of Josephine Duveneck, and they thrive at Peninsula School today. Josephine Duveneck's generous and tenacious spirit established a new and innovative school that would provide for children a place of joyful learning where each is recognized as an integral member of the community, a place that celebrates intellectual curiosity and finding one's passions, and a place that is committed to participating in and improving society. These ideals continue to inspire us today.

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*Today at Peninsula, the skills needed to be an active member of a community are infused into every nook and cranny of every day.*

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Josephine Duveneck's beliefs in educating the whole child, in social justice, in the importance of being an active participant in one's education, one's nation, and in the world and in inspiring children to learn through the choices they make each day, coalesced with the progressive ideals of Parker, Dewey and Montessori to form the principle approach to education at Peninsula School.

Recognizing the interrelatedness of the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical aspects of children was an early innovation of progressive education and remains a fundamental component of Peninsula's approach. In planning activities for the day, teachers provide creative and experiential outlets for children to approach reading, writing, and math, and for imaginative and experiential play. The intellectual curiosity of children is fueled by skillfully following the students' natural inquisitiveness and desire to learn about the nature, the science and mechanics of how things work, their surroundings and the larger community.

How a school chooses to allot time in the daily and weekly schedule reveals a great deal about its values and its approach to educating the whole child. At Peninsula we provide time EVERY day for children to engage in creative activities such as the arts, in physical

of every day. For two children to come to an agreement, they are guided by skillful adults to communicate, to listen, to feel, to negotiate, and to compromise. In a larger forum such as class meetings or when children work on group or whole-class projects, their skills are further challenged and guided in another way. As they are in the smaller interactions, in larger gatherings children learn to appreciate that a range of diverse views, backgrounds and lifestyles among their classmates are essential components of a community. They learn how to consider the perspective of others, they learn about the importance of empathy, they learn about standing up for principles, they learn about the power of adapting to change, and they learn that a working and healthy community is based on respect for every member of that community. Ultimately, they learn to be a confident contributor, a compassionate citizen and an ethical leader.

Josephine and Frank Duveneck's commitment to social justice was a natural part of their lives. They supported Cesar Chavez and the farm workers movement, made Hidden Villa the first summer camp in California to enroll children from a range of ethnicities, worked to help children in the inner cities, and supported Asian Americans who were affected by internment during

GRACEANN JOHNSON

*Continued from page 1*

admitted and I would get an Assistant's position (necessary for us to pay the tuition). We were determined that they were going to go to *that school* – somehow, some way.

Well, we were excited that they were accepted, and I was thrilled that I was about to teach Kindergarten with Maida Kasle, already a Peninsula legend, and also work with Ann Guy, another longtime parent and teacher.

By then, I had taught in public, private, inner city, and rural schools. My idealism had faded in the face of the bureaucracy I encountered. Schools were underfunded, and administrators and teachers were discouraged. Some had become resigned and cynical, looking forward to retirement. I was longing for the joy of learning that had attracted me to teaching in the first place.

While I was a stay-at-home mom with our young sons in their early years, I discovered that their pre-school embraced that joy of learning that I was looking for. I was astonished to find that same spirit throughout the classrooms and on the playground at Peninsula School, even in the Upper School. This was the community we were looking for. It was child-centered, creative, and respectful. I was so hopeful.

Through the years, this community has become our family. Our hopes and dreams have come true. Although our roots are back east and in the Northwest, our friends here have also become part of our families, and in the truest sense. Bob and I feel that who we are as parents, and now grandparents, is a direct result of the support of this community. We've learned so much from so many. There were teachers who mentored me and became lifelong friends. In the early days they included Barney Young (Director), Woody (and Ford) Nichols, Florrie (and Tom) Forrest, Elizabeth Aitken (Director), Marion Conley, Pat English, and my co-teacher and partner Gail Buschini. I am grateful for the generosity and support of the children, parents, and staff – especially my invaluable Assistant Teachers, too numerous to list – for these amazing and rewarding years.

About that joy of learning – I have not been disappointed. My walls and bookshelves (and now my computer) are filled with photos and albums of pictures of my children and former students, happy children covered with mud, paint, sand, and the elements. They are solving math problems, reading books, performing in plays, climbing trees, swimming in the creek on camping trips. The list goes on endlessly.

The school is the same, yet different, as we grow and change, reflecting our country and society. We have maintained our commitment to our values and philosophy, to creativity, to nature, to the arts, and to service to others. My hope is that we can find ways to meet the challenges of affordability and accessibility for both parents and staff without having to change who we are as a community.

After a couple of road trips with Bob to visit family and friends, I am looking forward to unscheduled days, as I contemplate what is next. I know that it will include some form of involvement at Peninsula School, my “home-away-from-home.”

## JOSIE

*Continued from page 1*

absolutely authentic and thoughtful in her interview and it was clear that what we heard from her, was who she truly was...and the chicken story was a perfect example of that. Josie was and is very real and direct in her interactions, bringing respect, warmth and genuine caring to each and everyone.”

Before coming to Peninsula, Josie taught at Heffalump Preschool in Palo Alto. Inspired by her continuing love of the natural environment, she then created and ran an outdoor Pre-K program called Pegasus. Some of her first students at Peninsula came into her class from that program.

Josie has had an impact on every child that she has taught. Each child and parent was mentored in those things that Josie found pivotal for the student's Kindergarten year – things like gaining social and emotional skills and the associated self-confidence to express their feelings openly and honestly. Every child was taught to understand that they are an artist, unique and inspired, and that expressing themselves through different forms of art is another way to say, “This is me”. She exposed young thinkers to the diversity of our communities and taught them, in a ‘five and six year old way’, how each person can contribute to growing a stronger community by recognizing the complexities and inequalities that exist in our lives.

Then there were the warm and distinctively memorable moments, like visualizing your best self for your self portrait with your eyes closed and a faint drumbeat filling the room, acting in your first play on stage and in the auditorium, talking about ancestors and family history by celebrating Dia de Los Muertos or hiding from the likes of the 12-headed beast in the Indian story of the Ramayana. There were the ‘we just need to get away’ days spent in nature with lots of water, bandaids with Josie's lotion, and magical moments with birds and water and hiking to the top of a very steep hill and sliding down on your bottom for hours! Josie spent countless hours creating and unfolding these experiences and many more for the hundreds of students who passed through her doors,

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*Taking a turn around the ice on the annual multi-class ice skating trip, a favorite tradition that Josie instituted and organized for more than a decade.*

## Through Her Colleagues' Eyes

### ALICE NEWTON

What to say about Graceann? – It was a joy, honor, and a privilege to work with her as one of her teaching assistants for 22 years. She always made time to discuss curriculum ideas, items of import regarding kids or parents, school issues, etc. and made sure I was informed and could grow in my responsibilities in the classroom. I enjoyed developing a curriculum and teaching Spanish and about Latino culture.

Graceann created a friendly, nurturing, respectful, fun and inspiring environment that we assistants, kids, parents, and other staff members enjoyed every day. In so many ways, she let us know that she cared about each one of us. No matter how stressful a situation might be, she helped us realize our strengths and face difficulties straight on, the way she herself did. She was flexible and allowed time to enjoy or deal with unexpected occurrences. To have helped at least 3500 people go forward in life during her 40 years at Peninsula is a significant accomplishment. More significant though is Graceann's legacy of dedication, energy, clarity, respect, honesty, thoughtfulness, flexibility, and deep caring as a fabulous teacher. Now I say to her as she often said to us, "Keep eating your Wheaties."

### BARBIE PAULSEN

Some of my favorite moments with Graceann would happen spontaneously when our paths crossed on the school grounds. "Oh," she'd say. "I'm glad I ran into you." Then she'd tell me to put on my teacher hat and we'd talk over something about a student or school. Or she'd say "Put on your parent hat for a moment" and we'd share insights about something that was going on with one or the other of my

children. I was fortunate to have her insights and support for both of my children and to have her as a wise, insightful, kind and generous soul in my life.

### PIXIE COUCH

We had taken Graceann's class to the creek at Memorial Park during the spring camping trip. The kids were scattered out along the creek bed, swimming, splashing, and skipping stones. Parents and staff were with the different groups of children and Graceann and I were at the far end standing on the beach. Suddenly the earth trembled, and we immediately went into



*Graceann with longtime assistants, being celebrated for her 40 years of teaching at Peninsula.*

"earthquake" mode, turning toward the sudden popping sounds coming from the other end of the creek and starting to run. It only took mere seconds for us to witness the falling of a mature Redwood tree right across the creek. The fates protected all the people in the area and all were shocked, but no one hurt. Does a head teacher get trained to deal with falling Redwood trees? Graceann kept her usual cool and provided the example for the rest of us. She shepherded all together and dealt with all the varied emotional reactions. One of her teaching hallmarks has been her commitment to full exposure of feelings and observations. The kids were encouraged

to express their personal experience of the event. Graceann has the admirable ability to tackle truth and honesty with her kids, particularly in uncomfortable situations.

### MARTY PULVERS

When my wife chose Peninsula School for our daughter, the dusty, inauspicious landscape did not scream "great school" to me. Not until I started spending afternoons as an assistant in Graceann's class.

I then experienced something I never dreamed of, a teacher giving the students all her attention, providing lots of sane latitude to complete projects in other classrooms, sincere concern and a very solid dose of laser-focused academics. Watching Graceann, I was awakened to a different philosophy of education, one that was based on stimulating and cultivating the natural curiosity of a youngster rather than dulling and ultimately suffocating that curiosity, which is what almost every other school in the country contrives to do.

I was given latitude too, despite having had no teaching experience. That not only allowed me to give undivided one-on-one time to students, it also exposed me to the fact that there are many ways in which we learn, and if a teacher is flexible enough to find the right key, everyone is reachable. I might have helped create a few enlightening moments for students, but I was enlightened a whole lot more.

Plus, I have something tangible from my days with Graceann. I own an apron signed by the students in our 1985 class, presented on my birthday. I couldn't think of barbecuing without that precious memento. It's not a word I use often, but I am not too shy to say that, like all her students, I just love Graceann Johnson.



*Graceann with her final class on their spring camping trip this year.*

**GAIL BUSCHINI**

Graceann. Just seeing or hearing her name brings to mind the dedication and integrity that characterize how she is in all she does. Add to that her warmth, humor, sparkle and intelligence and a picture emerges of a woman who has contributed tremendously to the communities of which she has been a part.

Forty classes of children have enjoyed the benefits of the rich mix of projects, regular classroom work, music, art, Spanish, and field trips that Graceann’s class offered. In addition, there are specific areas that drew her special attention.

In the years before we had a resource specialist on staff, Graceann educated herself about learning differences by reading and attending conferences and support groups for parents of children with special needs. She has continued to be fervent about seeking resources for children and families to provide the best education we can for these children.

Graceann worked for many years in partnership with other stalwart members

of the Personnel Committee to hire staff members who share our deeply held values about the education and care of children. I wouldn’t be surprised if the majority of our current teachers sat at the table in the Library with Graceann and the other committee members as they talked about what drew them to the chance to teach here.

Over the years, almost every day Graceann’s students could be found outside playing a game. These opportunities for exercise, skill development, and social growth were high on her list of priorities.

Graceann and I met many years ago, in a neighbor’s driveway. We became friends, members of a “Community Project” (which included a monthly Workday group, Briarpatch Co-op Market, Drama Group, and more!), parents and then colleagues at Peninsula School for close to forty years (six of them as co-teachers). I deeply appreciate the good fortune I have had to be one of the people who shared her four decades here, and honor her devotion and love for the many children she has taught.

**JOSIE**

*Continued from page 3*

leaving indelibly etched impressions in the children’s minds.

Josie believes in the power of participation and this was vividly portrayed in her affiliation with Second Harvest, the county food bank. Her legendary participation and enthusiasm spilled over to her students and their families as year after year, with the collaborative help of both Lower and Upper school students, they filled Second Harvest coffers with the bounty from “Tu-Tu” food drive days and earnings from Josie’s Class Bake Sale. The impact of this simple, thoughtful action lives on in many of her students as they use the largesse of their birthdays not for gifts but for food donations for the food bank.

If you were to ask Josie, it was the simple things that were most important to her: teacher things, like observing each student every day during morning sign-in to see if they were happy, sad, tired or hungry, or watching how they would devour and then express their letters and numbers, and the subsequent progress they proudly presented over the course of the year. Then there was just this place, Peninsula School, where conflict becomes a teachable moment and there are always enough caring adults in the classroom to allow for timely intervention.

When queried about what she will never forget about Peninsula, Josie, in her unassuming yet sage way, stated, “The most important memory I will take away from Peninsula is all the little moments with so many amazing people and unique kids throughout the years, especially my remarkable, hard-working and dedicated assistants, and the kind, generous, loving and involved families”.

To quote the last line of the unpublished play “Josie’s Peninsula Adventure”, “On Josie’s last day at Peninsula School, her colleagues could not believe she was leaving. Her warmth, thoughtfulness and fun-loving spirit had been part of Peninsula for as long as anybody could remember. As she headed for her bumper-stickered car on that final day, the staff clapped and danced in honor of this generous, devoted, skillful teacher and friend.”

## BARLEY'S ADVENTURES, A GEOGRAPHY LESSON

by *Andromeda Garcelon*

AN INTERESTING AND THRILLING STORY landed in my lap this spring. August Rock, Class of 2011, arrived home on one less-than-wonderful Friday afternoon to find an unexpected package on his doorstep. What could it be? "It was so magical!" he recalled. To his surprise and pleasure, it was a project he started in 2009 in Garv's class, and the package contained his well-traveled stuffed rabbit, Barley.

In the 6th Grade, his class did the Geo-Bear Project. Several classes did this activity, so there may be many other critters and packages still out there, roaming the world. The project involved each kid selecting a stuffy (new or old and dear), and making four key elements to accompany it. August picked Barley, a long beloved stuffy, to send on this adventure and then began making his items. First was a backpack, sewn by August in a black and gold fabric. Next was a set of index cards, made into self-addressed postcards. He made one postcard for each page of the third item, a passport booklet of sorts. This passport had a spot on each page for a person's name, the date and location, and a brief description or note. Last but not least was the handwritten tag with instructions around Barley's neck, laminated with tape. This card asked the holder to help Barley travel the world, to write the location, date, etc. on a page in the booklet, and to send a corresponding postcard to August. It also stated that "If you happen to get me in the year 2015, please send me back to my owner." August said he and his classmates were able to choose how many years before they asked for the animal's return. He chose 6 years. August received only 2 postcards over the years, and so had not heard of Barley's adventures or known he would see him again in 2015. He figured the experiment was long over, but all of that changed with the arrival of his package.

Once created, the assignment was to give your 'traveler' to someone, perhaps going on a trip, to start the process. August felt strongly that this was the most pivotal part of how the assignment turned out. "It is critical to give it to a first person who 'gets it' and invests in the project – sets the tone." He felt that if the first person writes a good note, and cares about who they hand it off to next, there is a greater likelihood to get more responses and better notes. Barley started out in 2009, and came back in the spring of 2015. He passed through the hands of 17 people. During that time, he visited 5 continents, 27 countries and many cities, islands, and sights. He was in Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, and is probably better traveled than many of us!

Reading the entries that Barley's hosts made in his passport was by far the most enjoyable result of this project. In Geneva, "Barley ate some chocolate and opened a bank account at UBS." Later we find,

"Barley is preparing for the long Russian winter, shopping for warm clothes and drinking vodka. He has visited the Kremlin, Red Square and made friends with a man called Borris." He also, "visited Victoria Peak in Hong Kong" and in Iceland enjoyed the Northern Lights on Valentine's Day. One of his traveling companions, "showed Barley how to act on a boat on the open sea," and then took him to dance at a music festival in Europe. Just looking up the cities and sights mentioned was



*Barley visiting Peninsula after his years traveling abroad.*



*August and Barley reunited and enjoying the view from the treehouse.*



*Countries visited by Barley (shaded).*

an amazing geography lesson (see the map of countries he visited). Comments like, "Barley was given to me by a very dear friend of mine from Jamaica," and, "Barley will travel the garden route to Durban. This is a special trip for us," exemplify the human connections as well. The affection for Barley and each other from his culturally varied hosts was so apparent in the notes they wrote. The final note keeps that tone, "But now after six years of traveling, it is time to go home to August Rock. Take care Barley."

Since August shared Barley's story with me, I have heard about at least three other students who had their 'geo-bear' returned to them, several who received postcards from their stuffed friend's adventures, and one person who could not part with theirs, and kept it. This creative lesson teaches so much more than geography, and while we may have new students taught by different teachers through new projects, I am so happy we have a school that allows teachers the creativity to teach and share lessons that continue in their students' minds and hearts, and sometimes even their mailboxes, for years into the future.

## FAREWELL TO BRIAN

BECOMING A TEACHER AT PENINSULA was almost fated for Brian Adams, our 8th grade teacher. His connection to Peninsula has been, so far, lifelong and constant. Brian's relationship with Peninsula began as a youngster in Nursery Blue, and brought him back after his 8th grade graduation to assist and teach most every summer in summer school. In 2008, straight out of college, Brian joined our teaching staff as the Upper School teaching assistant, quickly moving into interning and teaching 6th grade a couple years later, and then finally becoming our 8th grade teacher, where he has masterfully taught, guided and supported our graduating classes for the past four years.

It is perhaps this deep and unbroken connection to Peninsula that, in only a relatively short time, has helped make Brian such a cherished Peninsula teacher. His own experience as a student at Peninsula is surely a significant part of it too. In fact, he says that one of the things he has loved the most about teaching here is being able to create and facilitate some of those special experiences and traditions for his own students. Camping trips, playing music with kids (in rock bands and otherwise), and just hanging out are some of his best memories from his years as a teacher and a student. He believes that Peninsula offers kids the very important things, like unstructured time, a campus they can make their own and "genuine avenues to be who they are or want to be".



Brian among his students at the end of his first year as a head teacher in the Upper School.

It is obvious when you see Brian with his students that he always offers his authentic, "unguarded, fallible" self, and that this in turn allows for open, trusting and meaningful relationships between them. This experience of having a mutual, respectful and 'real' relationship with an adult is a lasting and amazing gift that Brian gives to his students. They are known and accepted by him in the same way that he was known and accepted by his Peninsula teachers. His dedication to ensuring that his students experience the same magic that he did in his childhood at Peninsula is utter and complete.

We must say goodbye (for now) to Brian so that he will have more time to dedicate to his passion for creative writing, and pursuing his MFA. Brian's students and colleagues will dearly miss all that he has brought to Peninsula as a treasured and skilled teacher these past eight years, but we also know that he will continue to be a present and active part of our community. We are glad to know that he plans to stay involved, and in the meantime, we'll keep our fingers crossed that someday we'll see Brian back teaching here at Peninsula. As his mentor, friend and former colleague, Jerry Hearn says, his "rightful nest" will be here waiting for him.



Brian and Jerry, colleagues and friends.

Jerry Hearn wrote this heartfelt tribute to Brian to appear in our 2014-15 yearbook:

*Almost two decades ago a fresh new face appeared in the Upper School scene that was destined for Peninsula greatness. I got to know the owner of the face, one Brian Adams, very well a couple of years later on a trip to England. A short two years after that he and I found ourselves standing together on the graduation stage along with his fellow classmates. Over the years, Brian and I have developed a close and lasting friendship; at first based on mentorship, but now as colleagues. For years Brian has tried, in vain, to put some distance between him and Peninsula, but has always been reeled back in to teach summer school, be an assistant and, finally (my dream come true!) to become a head teacher in the Upper School. Most people don't know this, but these choices have not been easy for him; for although he is a natural as a teacher, he has always had a parallel passion for writing. For years now, he has been leading a dual life, trying to keep a foothold in both worlds, but now it is time for him to stretch his wings and fly off to test the rare air of that other world outside of Peninsula. While I know this is necessary for him at this juncture in life, I also know in my heart that he will be back here in his rightful nest once he comes to his senses! I love you and wish you all the best, Brian, in your new adventures. Fly high and safely, my winged friend. – Jerry*

## DOODLING INTO THE FUTURE

AARON ZONKA HAS ONLY BEEN the 4th grade teaching assistant for three years, yet it is hard to imagine the class without him. Perhaps it is because he is an alumnus that Aaron fit in seamlessly from the beginning. It was Roger's last year before retirement when Aaron came to work as the 4th grade assistant, a year he remembers as particularly special since he was once Roger's student. He continued as the assistant teacher when Betty Achinstein came aboard the next year as head teacher, and has become a much beloved teacher over the past three years. Being able to foster "freedom, rebellion and play", teaching kids about being accountable, and supporting their creativity are all things that Aaron places a great deal of importance on and are ever present in his teaching. Also a very gifted artist, he has a way of helping kids to see and access the artist within themselves.

Deciding to leave Peninsula and devote more time to pursuing a career as a professional artist was a difficult decision, but one he knew was right. While he fulfills his dream to work as an artist and illustrator, Aaron will also be teaching after-school art lessons locally in Palo Alto and San Francisco. Although Aaron will not be teaching at Peninsula next year, we are happy to know that he will continue teaching and will stay connected to our community. We wish him all the best in his artistic endeavors, and hope to see him around campus often!

Our 4th grade teacher Betty has felt fortunate to have such a talented teaching assistant these past two years. In her own beautiful words, she honors him and all that he has brought to the classroom.

### TO AARON ZONKA

*Peninsula School will always be Aaron's home.*

*He is a true artist, creating magnificent masterpieces in every media, including the artistry of his interactions with others.*

*His sense of mystery, curiosity, and creativity are an inspiration to us all.*

*Aaron is a gifted teacher who understands what's inside the minds and hearts of 4th graders.*

*He helps us improvise, doodle, play guitar, and see the beauty of mistakes.*

*He lets us all see ourselves as works in progress.*

*Aaron's humor reminds us of the centrality of joy and play in our lives.*



Aaron Zonka



Alaina Sloo

*While he can bellow loudly, his empathy and patience surround us.*

*Aaron is always truly himself in his exchanges with kids.*

*Children follow him like the Pied Piper, with his guitar and sketchbook in hand and Pippi trailing behind.*

*He taught me so much about being a Peninsula teacher and bringing my whole self.*

*He supported me to value children's autonomy and freedom to play, laugh, explore, make mistakes and try again in a new way. He gave me permission to experience those same values as an adult.*

*Aaron is a true artist.*

*Peninsula School will always be his home.*

*— Betty Achinstein*

## ADIEU ALAINA SLOO

ALAINA SLOO, OUR FRIDAY Library teacher for the past nine years, has decided that the time is right to move on from Peninsula and dedicate more time to her work as an angel investor. She has found that the work of investing in startups has been taking more and more of her time and energy, and feels that she needs to now focus her energies in this direction. Alaina will miss Peninsula and the kids tremendously and hopes that

there might be opportunities to stay connected. She hopes she'll be able to substitute in the library from time to time, and says she's always happy to offer help and advice to Peninsula grads as they grow and start building their own startups!

Misha, our longtime Library teacher and Alaina's mentor and colleague, had appreciative words to share with us about Alaina. This is what she had to say about her friend and their years working together in the library:

"Alaina first became an assistant in the library when her son, Felix, was enrolled at Peninsula and one day a week was enough to give her a sense of connection with his daily experience.

Unlike other assistants in the school, Alaina was solely responsible for library class time on Friday with no direct supervision from me. She proved herself to be innovative and enthusiastic about reading, storytelling, and all things 'bookish', and as comfortable reading to the nurseries as she was playing word games with the upper-schoolers.

Probably the greatest gift she gave to me and the library program was her youthful energy; things that I just didn't feel I had the extra bandwidth to consider she took on with gusto. (This saved me more

than once from becoming an ‘old fart’ before my time, while injecting new fun into the library!)

New adventures and opportunities have recently presented themselves to Alaina, and after thoughtful conversations we realized it was time for her to leave Peninsula and pursue new dreams. She will be greatly missed by us all, but there will always be a trace of Alaina in the library air!”

## HE WHO IS TRAVIS

TRAVIS LACINA IS A TEACHER whom more than a decade’s worth of Peninsula’s students know and love. He embodies Peninsula, both as a person and as a teacher. This makes sense, since as an alumnus and longtime Peninsula teacher, he knows Peninsula deeply and wholly. A teaching assistant in Roger’s for nine years (2001-2010) and for the past two years in 8th grade, as well as a summer school head teacher for several years, Travis has nurtured, challenged, and imbued many students with a passion for all things creative. He is also considered by many of these students to be a true friend and mentor, a sentiment that you will find expressed clearly and lovingly in the quotes from some of his past students below. Although we are truly sad to see Travis go, we know that his new path teaching animation for The Walt Disney Family Museum is going to be an amazing one. I hope you will know when reading this, Travis, how much you mean to us, and to Peninsula.

“Though I’ve only known him for a short time, this year was long enough to learn that Travis is an amazing person. He has been incredibly supportive of my creative writing endeavors as well as any drawings or other art pieces I’ve put effort into, and gave me advice on them, which was helpful coming from a true artist. I, for one, will never forget the stories he has shared about his life, or the inside jokes that have been made, or even the times my class has made him laugh so hard he nearly falls out of his chair. Though I hate to see him leave, we all should wish him luck in his new path. I’ve been lucky enough to have Travis as a teacher, and I hope he will visit here at Peninsula School time and time again.” – *Camille Thrall, class of 2015*

“I feel very fortunate to have had Travis as a teacher and mentor, and now as a friend. He has had a profound impact on my life. He taught me about learning, about the importance of art and creativity, and about life. Although I’m disappointed that he won’t be a fixture at Peninsula School anymore, I’m glad that he’s going to be able to use his full range of talents at The Walt Disney Family Museum. They are lucky to get him. Thank you for everything, Trav!” – *Declan Schriever, class of 2009*

“Travis Times Two – I had Travis as a teacher in 4th and 8th grade, and both of these years he truly helped and impacted me in the best ways. In 4th grade, I was attempting to make a movie about baseball statistics as part of a project. I did not realize it would take almost every

lunch for over a month to finally finish it. Travis showed me how to use iMovie and helped me through every part of the production, while still allowing me to discover things on my own. We also did many things with art, and at that age I was not very good or confident with drawing or even being creative. Travis showed me some tips and really helped me be more comfortable doing things I was not used to or good at.

In 8th grade things changed; everyone had gotten older and the social and academic pressures had increased. Travis was always there to talk to or help with any issue, no matter how silly. He thought of students as individuals and treated them as such. He also knew when to be serious or when to keep it light, but most of the time found a way to combine them both to make a productive and fun environment, just another reason Travis was such a great teacher.” – *Rob Wilds, class of 2014*

“Dear Trav, thank you for everything. I had you as a teacher in 4th grade, and then again in 8th grade, and you can always manage to make me smile or feel a little better. You are so incredibly hilarious and goofy, yet can be there to give advice or listen when someone needs to talk about something serious. I remember

going into 4th grade, I was terrified and excited to have you as a teacher because the older kids all loved you, and I was nervous and intimidated. Of course the older kids were right, and I discovered you were just as amazing as I had heard. I don’t even know how to express how truly grateful I am to have had you as a teacher, and now to have you as a friend. Whenever I was stressed in 8th grade, which was often, I always felt comfortable to confide in you and get help. You helped me to realize it’s okay to not be perfect, whether having to do with schoolwork, or art. In all, Travis, you have helped me to become the person I am today through helping me to build self-confidence, and to openly express myself. While writing this I have tears in my eyes, overwhelmed with happiness and gratitude because of all the memories that have come to mind. You are compassionate, funny, supportive, and an amazing artist and teacher. – Love and best wishes, Ruby” – *Ruby Wycich, class of 2014*

“In my many years at Peninsula, I never encountered a teacher or person quite like Travis. Like many others, I met him in Roger’s 4th grade class and knew his reputation as being one of the most likable teachers in the school. What I didn’t know is how great of an influence he would be on my life. Throughout not only the transition from Lower School to Upper School but also through adolescence and growing up, he was without a doubt someone I could count on for advice, a reality check, support, and tons of laughs. He helped me grow firstly as an artist and creatively driven person, and secondly as a confident young adult going off into high school and now college. He is a truly intuitive, genuine, fun yet humble teacher and friend and I know he is going on to great things in life, so with that I wish him all the best!” – *KK Kashima, class of 2010*



Travis Lacina



## STUART SUSSMAN

FOR THE PAST THREE YEARS, Stuart has been teaching as an assistant in Josie's classroom. He is much beloved by his students, who could be seen running up to give him hugs throughout the schooldays even after they had moved on to new classes. He could often be found out in the yard, making a safe space for the children to experience free play, discovery, and personal responsibility. His care and commitment to the kids is clear and greatly appreciated. As one seven-year-old student reflected, "Stuart is really good at helping people dig, AND he is a great person. I was lucky to have him for my teacher!"

Stuart will be stepping down as a teaching assistant in order to spend more time with his family. He remains resolute in his commitment to the ideals of the founders of Peninsula School, and will, of course, continue to be engaged in his work as a conceptual artist exploring issues of social justice, non-hierarchical democratic principles, and the consequences of historical narratives.

Stuart will be missed by many a parent at his unofficial post, welcoming and greeting drivers each morning as they arrived at school and pulled into the driveway. Fortunately, Stuart has two daughters in the Upper School, and we will continue to see him around school and as a parent volunteer. Stuart, who previously coordinated the Spring Fair for four years and lent help to the Auction Team regularly, has always been generous with his time and talents.

### ANNUAL ALUMNI & 8TH GRADE COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

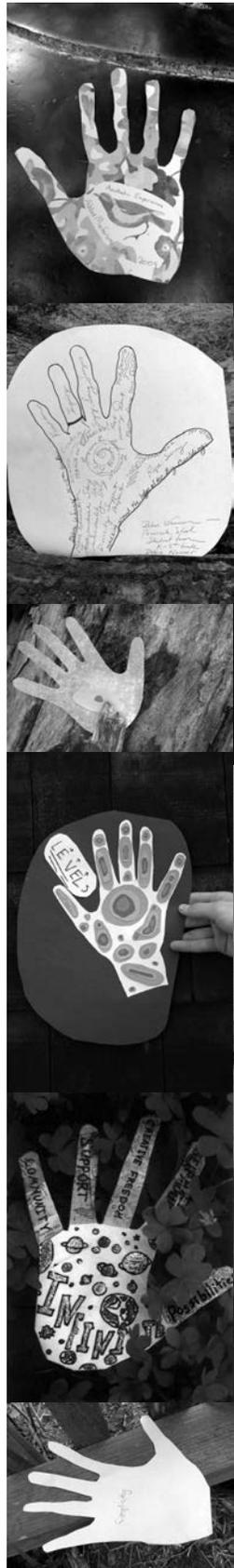
*The Annual Alumni & 8th Grade Collaborative Project has a different focus each year, and is open to all alumni and welcomes in the 8th graders each year as the soon to be alumni. The projects are then displayed during the Spring Fair. This past year's project was to trace your hand and represent something important at Peninsula that you hope we will carry forward into the future. See Katie's and the other submissions pictured. We hope you alumni will join the next collaboration! Look for the invitation to the 2016 project this December.*

## "MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT WORK"

by Katie Blank

THIS YEAR WAS THE TEN-YEAR ANNIVERSARY of my graduation from Peninsula School, which inspired me to participate in the Alumni & 8th Grade Collaborative Project this year. When I hear the phrase "Many Hands Make Light Work" I instantly think of work jobs. It was and I am pretty sure still is a big part of the culture at Peninsula. I remember in Winston's class having the job of sweeping the kitchen. Or in Marion's class, when we began to have bigger jobs like taking the trash from the classroom and putting it in the big dumpster. I can still remember barely reaching the top of the dumpster to be able to dispose of the trash. Work jobs taught me responsibility and they just became second nature to me. If a classmate was having difficulty completing his or her work job, other kids would assist or help that person finish the job. Work jobs or cleaning up after oneself just happened. I think Peninsula kids knew that once they were finished playing in the sandbox or with toys, or reading a book, they had to clean up after themselves. Maybe a teacher would have to remind kids before they moved to the next activity, but eventually we reminded each other and ourselves. As we progressed into Florrie's, Graceann's, and Gail's it became instinct to clean up once you were done with something – whether it be lunch, playing with toys, or during a class activity.

A fond memory of mine is planting our 8th grade gift, a tree. As depicted on my hand (in the center of adjacent page), four to five students including myself, worked together to plant the tree in the Big Field. It still stands today. I hold dearly to the idea of connecting with nature, and I learned that from Peninsula too. From our numerous camping trips to just having a campus that evoked the love of trees, nature was a part of our education. Planting the tree took us a week to do because we had to dig a very big hole. I remember diligently working on digging this hole, but with three other people it went more quickly than if only one person was working. In the future I would love to see Peninsula continue to give the kids an opportunity to plant trees or help plant a garden. After all, "Many Hands Make Light Work" is also learned through planting a tree or creating a garden on the edge of the driveway.





## ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

### Don Walsh '45

I had truly planned to attend our class 70th reunion during your Spring Fair. My wife and I were going to drive down from our home in Oregon. Unfortunately, a conflict came up this time. I still travel quite a bit, about one-half to one-third of the year. I hope to make the next reunion!

My name is Don Walsh, not Donald, and I have no middle name . . . my parents could not afford one when I was born during The Depression. I left Peninsula School after graduation in '45. From my time at Peninsula, I remember my friends Dick Merrill, John Sobieski and Peter Gump. In fact, Peter and I were fellow resident boarders while the other two lived at their homes.

I have been busy since my days at Peninsula, with many activities, achievements, and an extensive career centered around the sea and exploration. I served in the Navy from 1948 to 1975, seaman to captain. I also gained my PhD at Texas A&M in physical oceanography in 1968. I was appointed to the National Advisory Committee on Oceans and Atmosphere (NACOA) by President



Don Walsh on a 2004 North Pole expedition.

Carter in 1979, and reappointed by President Reagan in 1982 through 1985. Being a pilot and both a deep sea and polar explorer are my passions. I have visited or worked in 112 countries and participated in 26 expeditions to the Arctic and 32 to the Antarctic since 1955. In fact, in 1972 I had a geographic feature (ridge) in the Antarctic, the "Walsh Spur," named in honor of my contributions to U.S. national programs in Antarctic. For the past 20 years, I have been an expedition cruise ship staff member and lecturer and on-shore naturalist, often on trips to polar regions. Life is good!

### Nancy Besser (Wain) '65

I attended Peninsula School in the 6th and 7th grades (1962-64). I'm thrilled to see that

the Big Building is still there, and lovelier than ever! I spent much of my spare time doing pottery and weaving... and reading under a tree, when I wasn't in class. Is the huge rope swing still there? And the twisty slide? My teacher was Marty. I was there when JFK was shot and we all crowded into the Big Building to watch the only TV on the campus. And I very dearly remember that a young Joan Baez came and sang "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" to our class while we were all sitting around her on the front lawn. I went back to public school in the 8th grade, but my time at Peninsula was, and is still, very precious to me and it has served me well. I got a teaching credential, taught elementary school for a few years, then got a job in an



Nancy Besser (Wain) '65

engineering firm doing market research and other things. I now work for an environmental consulting firm, doing technical editing and managing document production for the studies and reports we write. I married a wonderful man – a consulting engineer, and we moved to Santa Barbara. We have a son who is now 28 and about to go into medical school.

### Daniel Marcus '69

I am a proud year of 1969 graduate, with ten years of Peninsula as a student in my heart and writer of an annual fundraiser letter and articles in the newsletter. The single greatest thing my parents ever did for me including creating me (which comes second or third) was send me to Peninsula. That pretty chestnut Yamaha upright you have was my gift to you, Peninsula! Florrie Forrest says there's a little plaque on it? But that's silly really, it's all about who remembers Big Bertha and who doesn't. And if you do it means you're just that much closer to death, but that's okay because at least you went to Peninsula!



Daniel Marcus '69

### Lara Hamilton '74

I'm living and working in San Jose as a Technical Writer for a medical device /



Lara Hamilton '74

software solution company. I've got three beautiful children who are in their 20's. I'm still single and a bit crazy after all these years as well! However, I'm living life to the fullest. It's not uncommon for me to be caught in the shower singing the songs, musical pieces and scores I learned during my time at Peninsula School. I'm grateful for the years of learning and laughter at such a magnificent place.

### Mary Winslow '76

I am an owner/teacher of ballet at Winslow School of Dance in Santa Cruz, CA and live here with my husband, Peter Hanson, a stone sculptor, and my daughter, Molly Hanson.



Mary Winslow '76

### Hilary Marcus '91

I attended Peninsula for 3rd (Graceann) and 4th grade (Gail) and yet my life and my love for learning have been greatly influenced by those early years of Big Building electives (Weaving was my favorite as well as basket making), tree climbing and rope swinging, and the many opportunities to learn subjects such as math in ways that connected concepts to my interests and experiences. I went on to major in Philosophy at UC Berkeley, always asking questions and loving the process of critical thinking, and then to graduate school in American Studies at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia where I completed my Masters and then earned my doctorate. After teaching at the college level for several years I completely changed directions and entered the world of non-profit and early childhood education and early intervention. I have worked for the last five years at Child Development Resources in Williamsburg, Virginia, serving children and families of children with some kind of disability or identified risk factor.



Hilary Marcus '91 out in nature on a retreat.

## Thank You for Your Generosity!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to this list of donors who gave to Peninsula School this past fiscal year. This group of contributors shows the strength of our community – made up of staff members, current parents, board members, alumni, PALS, grandparents, friends, matching gift programs from employers, and community partners – all working to support our school. We appreciate that together you helped us keep Peninsula a thriving and vibrant place to grow, learn, and play that makes it a haven for childhood and curiosity.

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**VAN CHALLENGE**

*We want to extend a huge thank you to the group of donors of the school's two new vans. We also offer sincere thanks to the whole school community for helping us meet this challenge with our Auction Raise Your Paddle. One van arrived in the spring and is on campus, and the second is scheduled to arrive late fall, 2015. We are so grateful for these gifts!*



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In our effort to stand behind our values and conserve resources, the December 2015 edition of News Notes will be sent out electronically to anyone whose email address we have on record. We will only mail a paper copy to those we do not have an email address for, unless you specifically request that we send you a paper copy. Please help us in this effort by updating your contact info and email at <http://goo.gl/forms/GycNCzwXyf>. Thank you so much!

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EDITOR: HEATHER HORACEK • WRITERS: JIM BENZ, KATIE BLANK, ANDROMEDA GARCELON, HEATHER HORACEK, GRACEANN JOHNSON, CHRIS TITUS VALE  
PHOTOGRAPHERS: NANCY ALLEN, HEATHER HORACEK, PAIGE PARSONS, PENINSULA SCHOOL ARCHIVES • LAYOUT: MAX SPECTOR