50TH Birthday Party coming up soon

March 3, 2012 is the date, and invitations are going into the mail on December 1. We’ve chosen an early date to send them out to give anyone the opportunity to use their purchase for 2011 tax purposes.

A 50th year celebration is a one-time occasion and you can look forward to a sensational party. Our celebration committee, headed by Ju Wotring and Patty Keys, began their planning months ago and are well along on that.

We’ll have food, drinks and lots of socializing. This gala will differ from the usual format.

There will be a silent auction, Big Board bidding. There will not be a live auction.

Montessori Up Close! Continues in January

These evening sessions, conducted by faculty and devoted to explaining the Montessori method, began in November and featured Woods High School and Woods Middle School.

Three additional Montessori Up Close sessions will take place in January:

Tuesday, January 10, Upper Elementary;
Tuesday January 17, Lower Elementary; and
Tuesday, January 24, Early Childhood and Kindergarten – all at 7 PM.

These Up Close programs are especially valuable for parents who want to know more about how the Montessori method works.

Acorn Fund appeal letter

We’re nearing the end of 2011 and our annual appeal for contributions to the Acorn Fund is being mailed the first week of December.

The Acorn Fund is our school’s source of financial aid to deserving students.

Remember, too, that although an appeal is mailed once a year, contributions to this fund can be made any time during the year.

THANK YOU!
Children learn best by doing. They follow our example in all things, as I remember well from my own childhood.

I have no doubt in my mind that the reason I am a chef today is because I grew up in a family of great cooks, all of whom had no qualms about spending hours a day cooking food for their families to eat. Not only did they have no qualms—they loved doing it. And they did it pretty much every day.

And when I was growing up, where did I spend most of my time? In the kitchens of my mother, grandmothers, aunts and uncles. And what did I do there? I watched a lot.

For whatever reason, I was endlessly fascinated in what went on at the stove and on the table, in the sink and on the counter. I watched from my station on the floor under my Mom’s or Gram’s kitchen tables, as all sorts of fascinating alchemy went on around me—from making noodles and hanging them on a clothesline strung overhead across the kitchen, to canning tomatoes to making fudge to the cooking of countless pots of beans to the rare occasions when Gram stirred up her boiled custard that no one to this day can replicate.

And I played at cooking, too, down under those tables—pots and pans, wooden spoons, plastic bowls and measuring cups that were not in immediate use were given to me, and I would “cook,” stirring and measuring and scooping under the table, out from under the feet of the women passing to and fro as they actually worked, but still close by where they could keep an eye on me and I could happily watch them.

And then, before I knew it, I was old enough to help, in ways large and small.

My little hands were quite nimble, and so I was often put to work shelling peas or stringing beans.

I was also good at picking the strands of silk from between the kernels of corn fresh from its green, fragrant shucks. I could hull strawberries and pick through dried beans and lentils looking for bits of stone or stray sticks or beans that were wizened and wrinkled or off-colored and untrustworthy-looking.

Soon enough I was trusted with a vegetable peeler and could tackle piles of carrots. Before that I remember being given the task of peeling dozens of boiled eggs for deviled eggs or those mountainous batches of potato salads that my mother made every summer for the annual family gatherings with all the cousins, aunts and uncles, all of whom dearly adored her potato salad.

I am certain, absolutely certain, that if I had not been included in those long hours of food preparation, if I had not helped plant and harvest vegetables, if I had not been intimately involved in tending livestock and preserving the fruits of our labor for the winter—I would not be a food-obsessed chef and food writer today. I would not be who I am today.

We are all the sum of our experiences, filtered through our own unique personalities, talents and skills which are inborn.

But I am only a sample size of one person. Let’s look at how [my daughter] Morganna has turned out. Most of her childhood memories of me are tied in some way to food. She remembers picking blackberries in the woods with me when she was about four or five.
She remembers me getting her to eat lamb by telling her it was dinosaur meat. She remembers her Aunt Nikki making her candied carrots, which she called “Bugs Bunny Candy” and they were the first cooked carrots Morganna would eat. She remembers being obsessed with garlic at an early age, and carrying heads of it around so she could smell them. And she remembers, from the time she could stand on a step stool and reach the counter, helping me in the kitchen. And in truth, she remembers helping her Grammy, my mother, as well.

Now, I am not saying that every child we teach how to cook at home is going to run right out and become a chef. Far from it. But what will happen is that every child who learns how to cook also learns how to eat. And what to eat. And how to eat it. And when, and why.

Cooking lessons bring a child a sense of accomplishment and impart important skills that push that child towards self-sufficiency and independence, which, as I recall, is the point of raising a child into adulthood. Knowing how to cook is a skill that will serve any child, as well as that child’s loved ones very well for the rest of their lives.

But learning to cook isn’t just about cooking, because cooking isn’t just a chore. It is part of our cultures. It is a part of ourselves, our families. It is history, it is art, it is science, heck it is even math. It is part of what makes us human.

For it is theorized that cooking food is what enabled us to evolve these big brains which went on to create art, science, music, literature, history, philosophy and culture. So if you teach a child to cook, you are not only introducing him or her to a useful life skill—you are teaching them what it means to be human.

Cooking and sharing food brings love and peace—so when we teach our children to cook, we are also teaching them how to be good, humane, loving human beings.

So, this Sunday, it was (my granddaughter) Kat’s turn to start learning how to prepare food and be a good little human while she is at it. She has helped her Daddy make scrambled eggs for several months now, by guiding his hand as he cracks the egg and sprinkles in the herbs.

But Sunday, I gave her her first real task—she sat down on the floor with me and helped shell horticultural beans. And she worked at it diligently for over forty-five minutes—and was sad that we had no more pods to empty! I had to open the pods for her—they are leathery and tough, but she would with careful, nimble fingers, pull each bean out and put them in the colander, while tossing the empty pod into the pot I had brought in for them.

She was so absorbed in the work—she commented on the beans, she counted them as they came from the pods, and she noted what color they were as she shelled them (horticultural beans come in many variable colors and patterns). It was wonderfully relaxing to have her working with me, both of us sitting comfortably on the floor as we worked side-by-side.

I am so proud of her. And she was and is so proud of herself—and guess what? Because she shelled those beans, even though they were an unfamiliar food, she readily tried them, tasting the broth of the stew they cooked in, and the beans themselves. She loved it. She insisted on stirring the stew with me, so I held her up to the stove and we carefully manipulated the wooden spoon in lazy circles in the pot, sniffing the delicious steam that rose to wreath our faces in the savory scents of herbs, onions, garlic, and leeks.

Later, she helped me mix the dough for the berry crisp we made for dessert. She was especially fond of sniffing the cardamom jar, and she helped me pour the rosewater over the macerating berries. I taught her to put a dot of rosewater behind her ears so she could “smell like a flower,” as she said.

I think she is well on her way to learning to love food, the way it smells, feels and tastes. And her education in how to cook has only just begun.

Happy holiday season
To Everyone
The Call for Order

Several studies have shown that children have better cognitive and psychosocial outcomes when their families engage in more regular routines.

--Angeline Stoll Lillard (2005, p. 293)

One interesting study showed that when elementary children had predictability in their routines, such as dinner time and weekend activities at age 4, they had higher academic achievement at age 8 (Fiese & Kline, 1993). Other studies confirm that regular family routines, even when there are other stresses in the child’s life, not only improve academic achievement, but also better self-regulation and parent/child relationships (Brody & Flor, 1997).

There is evidence that the need for routine spans from infancy into adolescence, but that some relaxing of routine is healthy for the adolescent as a marker for their growth into maturity. (Lillard, p. 294)

In the daily schedule at school children usually arrive and leave at the same time, have lunch and outside play at the same time, with some set lesson times and writing times. Yet the activity during most of the work period is chosen by the child. Children thrive when they have predictable routines, yet, at the same time, children thrive when they have a sense of choice and control (Lillard, p. 292) over their work in the classroom.

With the class work itself, there are specific steps involved in the use of each of the materials. This provides another routine that fosters a healthy learning environment. In fact, if we showed (children) exactly how to do something, this precision itself seemed to hold their interest... “Order and precision, we found, were the keys to spontaneous work in school.” -- Montessori (1967, p. 186)

The organization of materials in the classroom makes sense—information is grouped in a way that allows the child to make connections and build patterns. At the curricular level, Montessori education is extremely organized. Each lesson and material was designed with reference to the entire set across all topics, for children from ages 3 to 12. --Angeline Stoll Lillard (2005, p. 290)

Not only do routines that follow through time have an impact on our children, but there is also evidence that the spatial organization of the child’s environment affects healthy growth. Studies have been carried out using the HOME inventory, one in which researchers spend time observing in a child’s home and interviewing parents. They indicate that children who live in homes that make orderly use of the physical space perform better on cognitive tests and have fewer behavior problems.

Dr. Montessori saw that the order and beauty of the physical space of the child was an important factor in helping the child grow cognitively. “The child, left at liberty to exercise his activities, ought to find in his surroundings something organized in direct relation to his internal organization which is developing itself by natural laws.” --Maria Montessori (1917/1965, p. 70)

It is evident that children benefit from school and home environments that contain predictable routines as time passes and order in the space of their homes and schools, as well as orderly, precise, and connected lessons and materials (toys). Since this is the holiday season, keeping some regular routines, choosing carefully what we give children, and making an organized space for these things would be a great gift for them indeed!

........Compiled by Elizabeth Stepankiw
Fun and Games
On Halloween
Homework for the Holidays

Don’t let those idle hours go to waste

Although the following home "work" suggestions are good for the whole year, the winter holiday may provide a little extra time for families to explore some of these ideas:

Involve your child and yourself in a community charity activity.

Plan and prepare a dinner for your family together.

Plan and prepare a dinner together for your family the way the Greeks, Mayans, or some other ancient peoples of interest may have eaten.

Read together and discuss books that touch the soul and fire the imagination.

Go to a boatyard together and learn what you can about different kinds of boats, their purposes, cost, advantages, and disadvantages.

Visit a place of worship of a different faith than your own. Talk to the people there and learn as much as you can about this other faith.

Buy some stock together and follow its course over time. Pretend that you have a thousand dollars to invest, ten thousand, or a million.

Get out tape measures and some paper and help your child figure out how many square feet of carpet it would take to cover your entire house.

Assist your child in building a square model of the floor plan of your house out of cardboard, one floor at a time.

Make a list of all the things you might like to do with your lives-work, places to visit, developing athletic, art, or music abilities, and things you want to learn.

Plant a garden, tree, or bulbs around your house.

Work on teaching your dog a new trick.

Write a play and perform it for your family or make puppets and a puppet theater for the play performance.

Master some magic tricks to perform.

Interview the older members of your family and write a history of the family.

Meet a local artist and visit the artist’s studio.

Select a science experiment or art project to do together.

Adapted from Homework, Tomorrow’s Child Magazine, Spring 2001

The Book Nook Starts Here

Teacher Margi Dhruv recommends three of her favorite books, all by author Richard Paul Evans. One of them just happens to be about Christmas.

The Christmas Candle. On a snowy Christmas Eve, a young man on his way for a family celebration stops in a Chandler’s shop where the mysterious old Chandler sells him a special Christmas candle. Back on the cold street, the candle tricks him several times, leaving him penniless but richer for realizing that we are all part of one family.

The Tower. A poignant allegory that explores the virtue of humility. In ancient China, a powerful man who believes the only way to be greater than others is to be above them constructs a great wooden tower. He soon discovers that acts of kindness make a person truly great.

The Spyglass. A king ruled over a darkened kingdom where people were impoverished and dispirited. A traveler arrives and shows the monarch his kingdom through the lens of an enchanted spyglass – a kingdom not as it is, but as it could be. The king’s imagination is ignited by the spark of faith, and hope. By sharing his vision and inspiring his subjects to work alongside him, The king restores his land to glory.
Continued: Books for special purposes

These listed books are considered picture books which are good for building background knowledge:

*Rosalie* by Joan Hewitt – considers the relationship between a pet and owner. Rosalie, an old pet dog, doesn’t move as fast as she used to, but she is still seen as an important member of the family, and gives as much love as she receives.

*Let the Celebrations Begin* by Margaret Wild. A child, who remembers life at home before life in a concentration camp, makes toys with the women to give to the other children at the very special party they are going to have when the soldiers arrive to liberate the camp.

*Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman. Although a classmate says that Grace cannot play Peter Pan in the school play because she is black, Grace discovers that she can do anything she sets her mind to do.

*Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man* by David Adler. Lou Gehrig’s perseverance is legendary. During fourteen years as a first baseman for the NY Yankees, he played in a record 2,130 consecutive games. He considered himself a very lucky man, even though on his 36th birthday he was diagnosed with a rare and fatal disease.

*The Lotus Seed* by Sherry Garland. When she is forced to leave Vietnam, a young girl brings a lotus seed with her to America in remembrance of her homeland. Exquisite artwork fuses with a compelling narrative--a concise endnote places the story effectively within a historical context--to produce a moving and polished offering.

If you wish to get acquainted with the writings of our founder Ernest Woods . . .

The following list of titles is considered to be a complete list of Dr. Wood’s published writings.

- Mind and Memory Training
- Practical Yoga, Ancient and Modern
- Study of Pleasure and Pain
- The Glorious Presence
- The Occult Training of the Hindus
- A Guide to Theosophy 1924
- A Secret Doctrine Digest
- An Englishman Defends Mother India
- Character Building a Practical Course
- Concentration: An Approach to Meditation
- Great Systems of Yoga
- Introduction to the Science of Prayer
- Intuition of Will
- Is This Theosophy?
- Mind & Memory Training
- Natural Theosophy
- Pinnacle of Indian Thought
- Practical Yoga, Ancient & Modern
- Questions on Occultism
- Raja Yoga: The Occult Training of the Hindu
- Relax with Yoga
- Seven Schools of Yoga (Quest Book)
- Taking Charge of Your Life
- The Bhagayad Gita Explained
- The Dictionary of Zen
- The Garuda Purana
- The Glorious Presence; The Vedanta Philosophy
- The Intuition of the Will
- The New Theosophy (1929)
- The Seven Rays A Theosophical Handbook
- The Ten Original Systems of Yoga
- Yoga (Belle Sauvage Library)

Many of these titles (especially those out of print) can be found on the Internet for sale by individuals, eBay, Amazon Books, etc. Even Barnes & Noble offers a few, including some ebooks.