



ISC Views and Voices

“Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.” - John Dewey

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Terrific Change!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

January has proven to be a busy and exciting month! We’ve gained six new students and a volunteer! Welcome to students...

- Tom Falk—age 15
- Katie Ogle—age 14
- Blane Dicristafaro—age 9
- Chelsy Dicristafaro—age 7
- Kacey Dicristafaro—age 5
- Jeff Parry—age 18

and our volunteer...

- Kristina Romanyshyn



Kristina comes to us with expertise in

- Massage therapy
- Dance—improvisational, ballet, modern and release work
- Art therapy
- Sustainable living and gardening
- Biking and bicycle repair

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The influx of new students has done wonders for the activity level in our school! We have a fencing class starting soon and we are working to get drama classes and guitar lessons organized. We have a student who is working to get a work experience placement at the Valley Zoo, and we have two students organizing

a student exchange to Denmark (more on that on page 4)! The social atmosphere of the school has also changed significantly—there’s a great closeness among students and a reduction in conflicts—and the age mixing continues to warm my heart!



Tool Time Blane

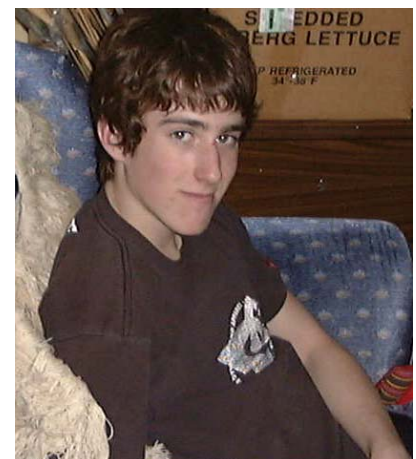


Chelsy, Allana (Visiting Week student) and Kassie play Twister!

January has also been a month of high traffic to the gym! Basketball caught the attention of fourteen of our students, and the fun generated by the daily games resulted in a game being organized against



Spy girls: Chelsy (left) and Kassie



Tom lets Dylan take his picture.

the students from the GAP program (the Outreach students down the hall)! First we played *with* the GAP students by forming mixed teams, and afterwards we played against them. A good time was had by all and the many sweaty, red faces walking out of the gym proved how much effort went into the game!

Nathen is also putting forth a lot of effort—into high technology, of course! He is building a box to hold a lense that will attach to a TV or computer monitor



and project as a 150" screen! Video games, movies and Nathen's computer work will take on new life, not to mention the king size impact our school Power Point presentations will have!

Other news... We are actively looking for a new location for the school! Already we have one possible site, just a few blocks south of where we are now. We are open to any suggestions so if you've heard of an available commercial building or an acreage that you think might work for us, please let us know! And if you happen to know anyone who might want to help us finance this venture, we'd sure like that tip too!

It's so exciting to continue being a part of this growing dream! Thank you, as always for all your support!



Kacey gets help signing in from Nicolette. (Our sign-in/sign-out sheet is a lot longer these days! Yahoo!)

I Can Breathe Again! My Children Finally Learned to Read!

by Carol Rice—a homeschooling parent

Waiting to Exhale was such an inspiring book. In fact, just its title inspires me the most. Have you ever caught yourself "waiting to exhale"?

I have spent so much of my life holding my breath. Raising my children has certainly been one of those situations. For me, every decision in parenting had to be thoroughly researched and then deliberated and discussed. And once the decision was made, I found myself holding my breath, worrying about how it would turn out.

One of the most deliberated decisions I made for my kids was the education decision whether to homeschool or not, and how to homeschool. It wasn't a decision made once and then laid to rest, either. It was a decision deliberated daily for years. How much should I push them, how much should I let them be, what should I teach them and how and when? I tried many different approaches from often widely opposing viewpoints. And as I swung madly about, my kids just seemed to go about their business, unaware of the conundrums I faced.

When my first child was a baby, a friend was very excited about a method of teaching your baby to read that was popular at the time. We decided to try with our babies, envisioning our babies reading very young and growing up very smart and well educated. Neither of our babies took to the program well, even though we tried it with them again and again. My son, Chris, refused to read at two years, then at three years. I gradually tried more traditional ways of teaching him letters and sounds. Surely he would read by five years of age. But not Chris. Maybe by the time he was six years old, or by seven? But Chris refused to be forced or cajoled into reading. By now his friends were learning to read in school, but Chris still couldn't read. He struggled to decipher simple words and he hated trying to read because it was so frustrating.

I was holding my breath the whole time. I was battling tremendous self-doubt. I must be an awful mother. Some folks advised me to take Chris to specialists, test his hearing, eyesight, cognitive

abilities, look into reading labs for him. Deep in my soul, those didn't feel right and I never took Chris to any of those things.

And then the miracle happened. Right about his ninth birthday, reading clicked in his mind and he just began reading. Within a month he was reading easily at his grade level. Within a year he had read every book on airplanes at the public library. The librarian, who thought he was a wonderful and precocious child because he read so much, gave him a special "adult" library card, so he could begin checking out adult books about airplanes.

I breathed a sigh of relief. The muscles in my stomach could finally relax. I could let my shoulders drop and I could unfurrow my brow. One of my kids, at long last, was reading.

But there were two more kids behind Chris. Renee and Liam, twins, are two years younger than Chris. Already they were seven years old. I had been trying to teach them to read alongside of Chris, to learn letter names and sounds, string the sounds together, hurry up and read! But like Chris, they refused to read as babies. They refused to read at two years, three years, even at five, six and seven years of age. There were times when I believed none of my kids would ever read. And of course it would be all my fault.

For a while I assured myself that Chris was unusual, and that my younger kids would read early or at least at a "normal" age. And I consoled myself with the fact that their dad and uncle had both been later readers. But my sister and I had both taken to reading young. Therefore it must be something on the troublesome Y gene. Perhaps my sons would learn to read late, like their male relatives. But my daughter would learn to read at a normal age, like my sister and me, surely.

But Renee had a mind of her own. Boy, truer words have never been spoken. People will attest to Renee having a mind of her own. And she would learn to read when she was darn good and ready. As the years went by, and she didn't read, I assured myself she would be like Chris after all and learn to read at her ninth birthday. But her ninth birthday came and

went and still she didn't read. How could anyone learn to read even later than nine years old, I screamed inside my head. On the outside I smiled patiently.

Within the next year she slowly began reading. It wasn't the amazing overnight reading leap that Chris had taken. But by her tenth birthday she was reading quite happily, although a little behind her grade level. By her eleventh birthday, she was reading quite well at her grade level.

I breathed a half-hearted small sigh of relief. Thank goodness she was finally reading. But my attention was stolen by her twin brother, Liam. Liam was a beautiful little child with light blond curly hair and a mischievous smile. He was as smart as could be, but wouldn't learn to read, no matter how much he struggled, not at nine years, not at ten years, not at eleven years of age.

People came out of the woodwork with ideas on what to do. I could have spent a million dollars on specialists to find out how to teach Liam how to read and to learn why he wasn't reading yet. But it just didn't feel right, so I never took him either.

Instead I leaned heavily on the words of John Holt. He said that many kids, especially boys, when left to their own learning pace, would not read until eleven to fifteen years of age. This idea was hard for me to believe before this, but now I embraced it. But even then, I still didn't believe that anyone who couldn't read by the age of fifteen was of normal intelligence.

I bet Liam would read by age twelve then. He was a smart kid. He would get it soon. But he wasn't reading at his twelfth birthday. Not at his fourteenth birthday, not even at his fifteenth birthday. At that point I even gave up on John Holt's philosophy too.

I tried to let Liam learn at his own pace and not worry (although my stomach was clenched while I held my breath, hunched my shoulders and furrowed my brow). I turned my attention to my youngest child, Julie, who was four years younger. Maybe she would learn to read early, I hoped vaguely. But she didn't. Maybe she would read at six or seven years old and I should be on the lookout for clues to teach her letters, sounds, something. There were no signs, and the years went by. Maybe she would be like Chris and miraculously read at age nine. Age nine came and went. Then surely she would be like her sister, and gradually

pick it up between the ages of nine and ten. Her tenth birthday came and went and still no reading. She struggled with very simple words. It was as though there just wasn't a place in her brain that could master the reading process. Not yet.

Her older sister tried to help her learn to read. Her friends' mothers tried to teach her to read. All were loving and patient and, sadly, unsuccessful.

Julie's twelfth birthday came. She could read a little, but only with great difficulty and frustration. Liam's sixteenth birthday came the next month. He could read a little too, haltingly, and with great effort. What to do? I just doggedly held on to the belief that they would read someday. I didn't consider specialists or therapies. I just waited, trying to ignore the worried voices in my head.

Then something happened. I have no idea what. They both just started reading. Maybe it was the incentive of online chatting. Maybe it was long boring days at home. Maybe it was just the right time, and the parts of their brains that can process the written word had a growth spurt. It doesn't matter.

Liam is sixteen and a half now. Six months ago, he was unsure about taking a driver's ed class for fear his reading level might cause him to lag far behind the class, or for fear of the embarrassment it might cause him. And how could he take notes? Would it be too much?

Today he is reading adult level books out of his father's paperback collection. He loves war stories based on real battles and other kinds of adventure books. Julie is devouring *Harry Potter and Goosebumps*. They are both reading about a book a week.

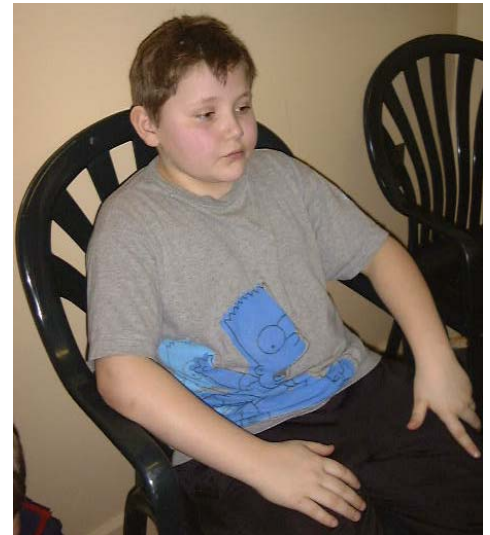
At long last all my kids are reading. I can stop holding my breath. I can breathe deeply and can actually dare to use both my lungs. It has been many years of waiting to exhale. The wonderful world of books has opened to them.

A book a week! Do you know what that means? They always have their noses in books! I take a deep breath and as I exhale, I holler, "Liam, Julie, put those books down! Pay attention to me when I'm talking to you. Stop reading for five minutes and get in there and help with dinner! Have you done your chores today or have you just sat there on the couch reading all day long?" They look at me, annoyed, and come dragging into the kitchen. I look into their eyes and

remember the years of waiting. I breathe a silent prayer of thanks for my kids and for the patience it took for me to wait until they read. The excitement of their reading returns to me.

"Hey, so what book are you reading now, honey?"

[This article originally appeared in the Spring 2001 issue of *Enchanted Families*, a local publication in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For permission to reprint or to write to the author: Starseeker11@aol.com]



This month's notable quotes:

"The JC's not so bad as long as you tell the truth!" - - Blane

"The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil." - - Ralph Waldo Emerson



Katie consults Kris on what to do in the video game she is learning and then gives it a try. It's not as easy as the more experienced gamers make it look!

On Fire for Denmark!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

"Nicolette! Do you want to see my Denmark binder?"

Amanda is on fire! She's going on an exchange to Denmark! Rebecca is hoping to go, too.

It all started when Amanda told me she'd been to see a psychic who told her that age 17 was a good time for her to travel to Europe and that she would have a wonderful time if she went.

"So I have to go to Europe!" Amanda said.

"Why don't you do an exchange with a Sudbury school in Europe?" I suggested.

That seemed a grand and inexpensive way to go so Amanda and I sat down and wrote letters to two schools in Holland and two schools in Denmark.

Within a short time, Amanda received an e-mail from a girl named Laura who goes to the Naevsted Fri Skole in Denmark. Laura was interested in exploring the exchange idea!

Amanda and Laura exchanged several e-mails and then Rebecca decided she wanted to participate in the exchange as well. A girl named Julie came on board in Denmark and now a double exchange was in the works! The plan became that Amanda and Rebecca would go to Denmark in March-April and Laura and Julie would come here in May-June.



Amanda and Rebecca began their research. They priced out their flights and, upon asking if there would be any addi-

tional costs, discovered they would need travel insurance, an international student ID card and a passport. They also found out the exchange rate on "krones" and worked out how much spending money they would need.

Once the costs of the trip were determined, Amanda contacted the Danish consulate to find out if she would need a VISA of any kind ("No") and if there was anything about Danish culture she should know about so her first few days in Denmark wouldn't be a total culture shock. "Life in Denmark is quite like life in North America," was the response.

The next thing Amanda did was to get reference letters from Ric and me so the Naevsted Fri Skole and Laura's family would feel comfortable opening their world to her. Amanda also asked for reference letters about Laura.

Now Amanda spends her days singing her many "Denmark songs" and asking everyone if they want to see her Denmark binder!

"So, Nicolette, do you want to see my Denmark binder?"



"Of course I do!"

And it is the epitome of organization! The first section holds the book on Denmark that Amanda got from the Danish consulate; the second section holds all important airline info ("I can get vegan meals and bring my bike!"); the third section is Amanda's Information section and includes her expenses, her "to do" list, her itinerary, the exchange rate and her travel agent's business card; the fourth section holds all the reference letters; the fifth section holds all the e-mails Amanda and Laura have shared (in them, the pink highlighting relates to important information about the trip and the purple highlighting relates to information about Laura and Julie); and the last section is a list of addresses for all the people who want postcards from Denmark!

At this point it's not sure if Rebecca will still be going, but Amanda remains optimistic. She dances away from her interview with me singing (to the tune of the Star Wars theme song), "I'm going to Denmark, I'm going to Denmark..."



You may have seen this face in our hallways... This is Roslyn, Tom's sister. She has been doing a Visiting Week with us. Nice to have you with us, Roslyn!

Announcements

- *For the parents of our newly enrolled students:* If you would like to read the past copies of our newsletters, I have them all (this year's and last year's) in a binder that you are welcome to borrow.
- **Open Houses:** We will be having open houses for parents who are newly interested in our school on Thursday, February 19th, Tuesday, March 9th and Thursday, March 18th at 7:30 PM.

Prepared by Nicolette Groeneveld