



ISC Views and Voices

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

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The New Building!!!!

by Nicolette Groeneveld



Tuesday, May 25th was a big day! As a school, we went to our new property so our students and parents could see our new location! The current residents were tremendously generous in allowing all of us—a group of about 40—to wander through their house and over their grounds.

And the general consensus? “Amazing!” “Phenomenal!” “Wow!” “Impressive!” “This is SO cool!” and many other expressions of wonder and joy!

Added to the experience was a spontaneous lesson on baby bison, as there were two newborns that the current resident was bottle-feeding.

It was my second visit to the property—my first being sometime last winter—and I was wowed once again by the splendor of the place. The huge house is not only stunning in its design and beauty, but also immaculately well-kept. The sprawling lawns are a perfectly

manicured carpet of soft green (said Kasie: “Not hard and poky like the grass at our school!”) and rows of beautiful evergreens line the driveway as well as create a gentle division between the house and the outbuildings. There are fields to run in and buffalo to look at (from a safe distance, of course); there is the stocked trout pond and the immense shop (our gym-to-be), and there is the barn with its six stalls that several of our students already envision occupied by horses!

Our new property is truly a dream location! There are so many things the students can do out there! Katie has gained Camp Meeting approval to have her dog at the new location full-time; Bretton



has talked about a skateboard park; I’m taken by the idea of raising chickens and selling farm-fresh eggs, and the list goes on!

The new location is also already drawing new students! We’ve already enrolled one new student for next year and recently we had three visiting students (from different families) in one day!

We’re ready to grow, and we believe having our magnificent, new, *permanent* location will add significantly to the magic our school offers!

So, thank you once again for all your support and for believing with us in this magnificent dream!

Ask and You Shall Receive

by Nicolette Groeneveld

It never ceases to amaze me how blessed we are here at ISC! The creation of the school showed me one miracle after another, and as we continue forward, the magic that helped us to open is moving right along with us!

We have a group of students who asked for photography lessons. As they began their work with Filip Labeledz, our volunteer photography teacher, they decided they would need darkroom equipment, and Filip also recommended a series of books for them to look at. As most of you know, I sent a request out on our e-mail list for the required items and within a week, the books we needed were donated! Then, I got a call from Chris Bolch of Pioneer Press who told me that Pioneer recently dismantled their darkroom, and she invited us to come pick up any equipment we would be able to use! This included a massive process camera, a special revolving door, a darkroom sink and many other helpful items!

Our new building is, of course, another magnificent story, and there are so many more I could tell!

Thea Alexander said, “Great things are only possible with outrageous requests.” The past three years have proven to me that when a person has a vision and moves toward it with unshakeable determination—believing in the best and maintaining absolute faith—invisible forces truly do spring to action to support, clear obstacles, provide material help and—bottom line—perform miracles! Powerful learning happens along the way, with the most wonderful “lesson” being that if you’re bold enough to ask, you truly do receive!

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Free Spirits

by Nicolette Groeneveld

This article was submitted to Vue Weekly. It was also written before it was decided that Kris will be staying with us next year.

Kris is a magnificent fourteen-year old whom I have the pleasure of driving to school every day. Today, he is telling me about the boarding school he is going to next year in Australia. It's a very strict and rigidly structured school. Currently, Kris is at a school that entrusts him absolutely with freedom and responsibility. He chooses his own learning path and, due to the democratic nature of the school, he helps to run it. Kris's current school is the polar opposite of where he'll be next year.

I think about how much I'll miss Kris when he's gone. He is so amazingly intelligent, insightful, wise, quick-witted, fun, to-the-point, confident. He also has the tremendous gift of finding the positive in seemingly negative situations.



"So you see, Nicolette," Kris sums up, "It may not be *that* bad."

"But Kris!" I blurt out, as a terrible thought hits me. "This boarding school... What will you do with your free spirit?"

Kris reflects a moment, then shrugs. "I guess I'll save it for the weekends."

My heart breaks.

How many children in today's traditional education system put themselves on "hold" during school? How many children "shut down" when they walk into school and "turn back on" only at recess and home time? How many children live for weekends and holidays because then they are "free"?

I love watching free children. They

talk constantly, they move constantly, they sing confidently, they dance with total abandon, they scribble wildly using



myriad colors, they laugh, they sparkle, they *live!*

It breaks my heart to watch children in regular school. They're grouped twenty-to thirty-some in one room and told not to talk. They're expected to sit still for minutes to hours. They sing, but rarely with confidence or passion. They dance, but it's usually to someone else's steps. They color inside the lines, and, sigh...at Thanksgiving, twenty-three brown turkeys decorate the wall; at Halloween, twenty-three orange pumpkins replace them; at Christmas, twenty-three golden angels take the places of the pumpkins. And in what atmosphere are these projects created? Maybe in the class I heard about where the teacher said, "Okay, boys and girls, you've been good so we'll have art class. But you're to work quietly – no talking!"

I read a story about a kindergarten-age boy whose mother struggled every day to get him to school. "I don't have *time* for school!" the boy would cry. He needed every waking moment to pursue his fascination with dinosaurs, which he did by reading books, making models, watching videos, exploring dinosaur computer programs etc. School was a frustrating and meaningless interruption of his engrossing world of learning.

I taught a wonderful, bright, witty boy who, in grade eight, took himself off Ritalin after having been on it for four years. Said the mother, "His teachers always said he was ADHD, but at home he seemed like a perfectly normal kid to me.

He played, he moved around a lot, he liked to talk. Isn't that how kids are supposed to be?"

These days, all kinds of "specialists" offer "special programs" to help children "function better" in school. From prescription drugs to tailor-made study programs, everyone has something to offer "struggling" children. I shake my head at it all. It's symptom relief – like putting a band-aid on a cancer tumor! Won't anyone admit the *real* problem?

The unbelievable growth of homeschooling in Alberta – and particularly the growing number of "unschoolers" – tells me that people *are* starting to re-evaluate the school system and its effects on children. Thank goodness! Because, while I predict the very "solid" children like Kris will succeed in life *despite* the system, too many others will be immeasurably damaged by it. I witnessed it for the ten years I worked in the system and remorsefully, I recognize having perpetuated the failing, the labeling, the giving-up-on and the punishing. But never again! I now stand unequivocally for the opposite: schooling that recognizes the value of conversation, movement, self-expression and coloring outside the lines, and schooling that honors and celebrates all children for the magnificent, unique, free-spirited individuals they are!



Greg was in the office looking through a book on optical illusions. Katie came to the office door and said, "Hey Greg, what are you doing?"

"Living," he answered.

Small Delights

by Nicolette Groeneveld

Chelsy was playing Marbles with Katie, Julie, Nicolette, Jessica and Kris. At one point, Katie, who could see out the window to the street, said, "Chelsy, your mom's here." Chelsy stayed with the game. A few minutes later, Katie left the room, and when she came back in again, she said, "Chelsy, your mom's leaving!" Chelsy answered, "Tell her I'll walk home!"

Katie's mother came to pick her up one day at 4:45. When Katie saw her she exclaimed, "What?! It's not 5:00! You're early!"

Kacey, Chelsy and Blane's mother phoned me one afternoon and asked if I could ask her children if they wanted to be picked up "now or later".

I found Kacey first, on her way to the toy room. "Kacey, your mom wants to know if you want to be picked up now or later?" "Later!" was Kacey's determined response.

Blane was upstairs working on his computer and chatting with his friends. "Blane, your mom wants to know if you want to be picked up now or later?" No hesitation: "Later!"

I found Chelsy in the computer "office" watching the Dance Dance "addicts"(!). "Chelsy, do you want your mom to pick you up now or later?" She too said, "Later!"

I went back to the phone and said to Mom, "Well, it's unanimous! They all said 'Later!'"

I love working at a school where kids don't want to leave!

When Jeff first started at our school, he had a really hard time remembering to sign out. In one week he got four one-dollar fines and the following week, he got a few more. Finally, he figured it out and became consistent at signing out.

Shortly thereafter, Jeff got a job at Hole's Greenhouses. After his orientation he came to me and said, "You know, Nicolette, it sure is a good thing you fined me every time I forgot to sign out and that I got used to doing it! At Hole's, if I don't sign out, I don't get paid!"

Back from Denmark!

by Nicolette Groeneveld

They're baaaack!

With bright pink hair and a sweater to match, Amanda comes dancing into the school! She is warmly greeted and gives hugs to all! Following close behind her is Laura, Amanda's Danish exchange partner.

Amanda is bombarded with questions. "How was it?" "What did you do?" "What was the school in Denmark like?" "Are you glad to be back?"

The next day, it all happens again when Rebecca returns to school with her exchange student, Julie.



Now that it's newsletter time, I sit down with Amanda, Laura and Julie for an "official" interview. The general consensus is that this exchange is wonderfully "fun!" Canadian and Danish alike, the girls say it's interesting to be in a different country precisely because everything is so different! Amanda loved seeing new places and seeing how people in Denmark live, and Julie, who's never been to North America before, finds everyone in Edmonton "so nice!"

In terms of language, Amanda said being in an environment where she couldn't understand anyone was "interesting at first, then it became irritating and eventually it was just boring!" Julie and Laura, who are both beautifully fluent in English, obviously don't have the same issue, but Julie is planning to drop some of her English classes back home since she feels

she's getting her fill of practice in pronunciation and comprehension!

In terms of classes, there are more classes at the Naevsted Fri Skole than at ISC. Laura is actually relieved not to be taking so many classes; she is enjoying relaxing and finds she is still learning a lot. Julie is continuing her French classes with me and misses some of her other classes. She's also used to going home around two or three o'clock so she's had to adjust to longer days here.

Extra-curricular activities for Amanda included going to castles, cathedrals, museums and shopping! Julie's already been to West Edmonton Mall's Waterpark and to Drumheller, and there's a trip to the West Coast in the works. Laura's also seen the famous WEM, and her touring will include a trip to Banff.

Amanda, Laura and Julie all say this exchange has been a great learning experience. Though they can't put their finger on how they've changed, they know they've stretched their horizons and grown as individuals.

As a school, we've been delighted with the whole experience! We missed Amanda and Rebecca while they were gone, but now we're blessed with the presence of two extra students—and wonderful young ladies they are! Amanda and Rebecca have set a precedent in terms of how far "field trips" can go so travel is now a very real possibility for all! And the next destination? Amanda's been talking about Japan...!



The Latest Crazes!

What a hoot! Drama class! From tag, to concentration games, to mime work, charades and improvisation, it was an occasion for all of us to get active, get silly and PLAY! Young and older, we filed into the gym and followed Christie Mawer's lead. After her great introduction to the world of drama, Ric took over and continued the classes. And it was all fun, games and learning until... DDR took over!



Are you familiar with DDR? Dance Dance Revolution? If you've been to Playdium or visited an arcade, you've probably seen it. Or, if you've been to the school during the last few weeks, you've heard the pounding of feet from above, and upon following the noise, you've seen various students with their eyes glued to a computer screen and their feet moving like crazy on a mat with arrows. That's DDR! And it's become a very popular "sport" here at the school!

Nathen first brought it in, and it caught on quickly! Greg practiced for an hour and a half straight one day and came to me dripping with sweat but beaming and saying, "You should see how good I'm getting!"

DDR is something that takes dedicated practice to master! It may look easy, but it's actually *very* challenging! Nathen's really good at it after practicing on and off for seven years; Katie and Kris are catching on amazingly well, practicing two at a time! And me? Well, I'm starting to get the hang of it! It's fun—but oof! There's my aerobics for the week!



As I write this, Julie comes for the Marbles board. Another craze! This is a game like Sorry, except it's played with marbles and playing cards, and players play as a team. Students (and staff!) can play either with four people or six, and the best part of the game is that when players finish their game, it's not over for them; rather, they begin playing their teammates' marbles. The game takes a lot of strategy and focused attention, and, of course, getting the right cards helps a lot too!



Announcements

- We will be having our last **Open House** for the year on **Tuesday, June 8th** at 7:30 PM. This will be a meeting for newly interested families.
- Our last Talkabout for the year will be **Tuesday, June 22nd**. We'd like to make it another **Potluck!** Join us anytime after 4:30—we'll eat at 6:00. Please RSVP!
- The last day of school will be Friday, June 25th and school will begin again Tuesday, September 7th.
- We will be moving in the second week of July. I will send out an e-mail with the dates and times when they are set. Thanks to all who have offered to help!

Always more small delights!

Fourteen-year-old Katie walked into the art room where Kris, Jessica, Sam and Julie were playing Marbles, and Kassie and Kacey were playing Barbies.

"I want to play!" Katie said.

And she sat down in front of the doll-house with Kassie and Kacey!