

# NEWS



# NOTES

SPRING 2015

## LISTENING TO PENINSULA

by Jim Benz

HOW DOES SOMEONE, new to a community, learn enough to lead that community – navigating goals, decisions, and challenges – into the future? This is a looming and inevitable question for anyone who takes on a leadership role in an institution, especially one they have not worked at previously. Leadership transitions are an enormous challenge. The leader must absorb an enormous amount of information about traditions, processes, culture, history and people in a relatively short amount of time.

Soon after I was hired in October of 2013, Al Adams, the very successful, long-term head of Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, was contracted to work with me in my first year as head of Peninsula School. Al, now actively retired, authored what he terms an “Entry Plan” for school heads in their first year at a new school. At its most simple, the process helps heads of schools immerse themselves in the culture, history, and, most important, the people of the school in order to build a knowledge base and enough of an understanding of the school’s culture to form an agenda and set strategic goals for the leadership of the school. I used a similar process in previous positions, but Al’s process is the gold standard.

The entry process is comprised of three parts: 1. Conduct meetings with individuals and groups. 2. Report out on the aggregate of meetings to the community to solicit feedback on the accuracy of the report. 3. Develop a set of challenges and goals and communicate those to the community. I’ve completed part one, and this article – my report to the community at large – is part two. I am asking you to provide feedback should there be anything



Head of School, Jim Benz, applauding Andrea’s class production which honored Earth Day.

I have an inaccurate understanding of or that I misinterpreted.

In February of 2014, during my first of two visits after being hired, I began this process by meeting with a handful of administrative staff members. Since then I have met individually for an hour with every staff member, board member, and with a few individual alumni and parents of alumni. (For those interested, we have 72 employees and 18 board members. I met individually with about a dozen others as well.) Additionally, I’ve met with three groups – current parents, parents of alumni, and alumni. By the end of March of 2015, one year after beginning, I formally completed the meetings.

During the meetings, I asked many questions but focused on a set that were designed

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## ADVENTURES IN ELEPHANT RESEARCH

by Tory Herbert

EVEN BACK AT PENINSULA, I always knew I loved the outdoors – running barefoot, climbing trees, and listening to the birds from the treehouse. By the time I entered college, I knew I was meant to be a Biologist. I especially loved fieldwork and I wanted to step out of my comfort zone, so I decided to do an abroad program in Kenya and Tanzania studying wildlife management and



Tori in the field with her research subjects.

ecology. While I was in Tanzania, I did a month of intensive research, investigating ecological factors influencing the African Elephant in the Tarangire-Manyara ecosystem of Tanzania. Considering the high level of human-wildlife conflict in the area, elephant distribution pattern has a large impact on the lives of the local people. During my research,

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to provide me with as much insight and information about Peninsula School as possible. I took extensive notes and reviewed the notes to create a summary of themes. The primary questions and the summary of responses is what follows.

In general, the responses to my questions were amazingly similar in theme. Yet narrowing down the responses into a coherent and useful format was a challenge. I used my judgment to take the highest frequency responses that were similar and categorized them under a theme. For example, for the question “What are five words that characterize Peninsula?” responses such as “student-directed, student voice, choice, authentic curriculum, and play,” were high frequency responses. I felt that these could fall under a category I titled “Child-Centered” even though some of those could arguably fall simultaneously under other categories.

The meetings were informative, energizing, thought provoking, and inspiring. I was impressed with the commitment each individual and group demonstrated to the school, to its mission, and to its philosophy.

## WHAT ELEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL TO PRESERVE?

The list of things people told me are important to preserve for Peninsula school were very clear and consistent, and there were a lot of them indicating that people feel very positive about the school.

- Child-centered, progressive philosophy of free choice, unstructured play and creative, non-competitive academics where critical thinking and problem solving are emphasized and a variety of learning styles are respected.
- Focus on the individual child within the community and the democratic process where every child and his/her contribution is valued and there is an appreciation for the diversity of ideas, perspectives and lifestyles.
- Staff members who understand and are committed to Peninsula’s philosophy of education and child development including an emphasis on authentic interactions, social justice and equity.
- Social and emotional learning, through experiences, collaboration, unstructured play, conflict resolution and deep relationships with peers and teachers, is considered equally important to academic learning.
- The campus including climbing in trees, the tree house, puddles, dirt, student-constructed and unmanicured play areas, the Big Building, and unique classrooms.

While the original spirit of this question was focused on intangibles such as are seen in the first four answers, preserving the campus arose as a factor that has inspired an enormous amount of affection and a sense of home. It is clearly one of the most important physical assets that has been and should be preserved as an attraction for families for many generations.

Three components – the Big Building, individual classroom buildings and natural outdoor spaces – inspire creativity, passion, reverence, and a sense of mystery and fantasy for children at every stage of development. The Big Building is an historical and visual gem and provides one of several cultural touchstones for the school. It’s a building of majestic scale that is the center of life of the school and is widely

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considered a second home. We have a set of unique classrooms that are each age appropriate and reflect the individuality of each year and the personality of the teachers in each building.

Finally, one can’t think of Peninsula’s campus without considering the spiritual sustenance that the trees and natural spaces provide. Students have a special relationship with the natural landscape at each stage of their lives – they climb trees, swing from the rope swing over water, play in the mud, hide among shrubs, and have an abundance of room to run. Rites of passage deepen their relationship and understanding of the natural environment, thus the campus becomes the curriculum.

## WHAT DO WE DO WELL?

The primary and most important asset the school has and has had throughout its history is a teaching staff committed to the growth of each and every child. The relationships between students and staff and the impact that a staff of passionate and dedicated individuals have had on the lives of children over decades of time was clearly the most influential and positive asset of the school. From alumni who attended in the 40’s, 50’s and 60’s to current students and Parents of Alums (PALS), the theme was repeated over and over: the people at Peninsula are the bedrock of the school.

- Children at Peninsula school feel known, loved, secure, empowered, and they feel connected to a strong community of caring adults.
- Students are led to learning through a low-pressure (assessed, not graded) relaxed environment that is cooperative rather than competitive. They own their learning and are self-motivated to learn for the joy of learning.
- Students have abundant freedom to practice responsibility and have supportive adults to help guide them to learn from their inevitable mistakes along the way. They learn hands-on about taking responsibility for their own actions.



Earlier this year Jim worked with each class to put in native plants at the front of the school while getting to know the kids. Here he is planting with Annie's class.



Jamming with upper school rockers, Jim had fun at this year's Rock Concert.

- The community is dedicated to social justice, equity and inclusiveness, and the school includes these values while practicing democratic values both in the classroom and among parents, staff, and board.
- Graduates are successful in school, careers and life.

#### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SKILLS OUR GRADUATES POSSESS?

If you've read anything about education in the past few years, you may have some knowledge about what are called 21st century skills. Essentially, there is a strong movement away from memorization, rote knowledge, and convergent thinking. The more important skills that schools should be developing in students are creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration. Given the list below of graduate attributes that I heard from our community, you'd think we designed a 21st century school, yet we've been doing it for 90 years!

- Community-minded. They are considerate of others, collaborative, inclusive, and appreciate diversity. They are outgoing, have

- an ability to compromise, know how to run a group and how to participate appropriately in one.
- Learners. They love learning, have intrinsic motivation, are curious, have high self knowledge, and advocate for themselves. They persevere and are creative, out of the box thinkers who know how to learn for learning's sake.
- Individuals. They are comfortable with themselves, are grounded, fearless, ok with being unique, and adaptable to change.
- Comfort with adults.

Overall, the responses confirmed that our graduates leave the school with many excellent skills that serve them well in high school and in life beyond. They are reported to be self-assured, creative, outspoken and to possess a strong sense of social justice and the importance of every individual. High School teachers report that they love kids who come from Peninsula school because our graduates are exceedingly comfortable with interactions with adults, are intellectually

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curious, are interested in knowledge for the joy of knowledge, and know how to include others in group decision making.

One parent observed, “Kids from many other schools have knowledge of facts, but Peninsula kids have integrated knowledge.” An alumnus, illustrating the strength of Peninsula’s ability to develop intellectual curiosity, reflected, “I discovered that I was an annoying student in high school because I kept raising my hand and asking questions. I learned that was normal at Peninsula but not at other places.” Another alumna, summing up a sad fact about America’s school culture, put it this way, “At Peninsula I loved school. When I went to high school, I didn’t know school was something you were supposed to just tolerate.” [The actual quote from this alumna was, let’s say, colorful. I edited it for this publication.]

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OF PENINSULA AND WHAT CHALLENGES WILL PENINSULA FACE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?

Similar to “Elements to Preserve,” the list of challenges was longer than what other questions inspired. This indicated to me that participants in my meetings generally had a balanced and objective perspective; they were articulate and passionate about the strengths of the school, yet when they talked about the challenges, they clearly had been thinking about them and were concerned. Our challenges are complex. They are rooted in the rapidly evolving culture of education in the 21st century in general, and, simultaneously, local to our school and a changing region. Additionally, we have dilemmas and contradictions that will require a great deal of time and resources to resolve.

- **LOCAL ECONOMY EFFECT ON STAFF AND PARENTS:** The Bay Area is expensive, with no end in sight. Teacher attraction and retention in this economic climate is and will continue to be increasingly challenging. Teacher compensation will continue to be the biggest challenge. As the demographic of the area continues to be a challenge to middle-income and low-income parents, we risk losing that important part of our parent body and losing our identity as it has been defined.
- **MAINTAINING THE CULTURE OF THE SCHOOL:** The changing local culture in Silicon Valley may attract parents who may not appreciate progressive education and its values. Parents who don’t understand the importance of choice and play may pressure the school to make the school more academic. Preparation for secondary school may influence curriculum decisions. The transition from veteran teaching staff to teachers new to Peninsula poses a challenge to maintaining the philosophy and practice.
- **DIVERSITY:** Creating more diversity among families and staff (Diversity includes but is not limited to racial, ethnic, religious, soci-economic, sexual identity, gender identity, lifestyle) is a challenge. Middle income and culturally diverse families are shrinking with the changing economy. Tuition increases threaten middle class enrollment. Progressive education values can be a challenge for some minority groups to accept. Families with both parents who work and single parents are burdened by volunteering for

three major school events. Our community can be perceived as cliquish and insular. There is a fear of what we will give up or what will change in order to be more diverse and inclusive.

- **CURRICULUM:** Parents, both current and prospective, are not clear about the academic curriculum. The curriculum is not written anywhere for parents to access. There is lack of clarity among parents about how each year connects to the previous one. The overarching philosophy of the school as it relates to academics is challenging to articulate and has not been articulated well in the past.
- **TECHNOLOGY:** Unclear philosophy for practice and use in the school for kids and adults. Technology philosophy is not articulated well. Website has not been an effective tool for current parents for information or connecting with the school, nor has it been effective as a marketing and communication tool for prospective parents.
- **CHANGE:** Our community isn’t comfortable with change and has contradictions: want to progress but don’t know how to or are afraid of what will change or be lost if we do progress. Can’t articulate “the magic” because to do so will ruin it. Fear of changing into a school that is like all the others. Fear of losing uniqueness. Fear of teachers losing autonomy. Not a clear consensus on what “progressive” means. Even small changes take a long time and the process can be exhausting and frustrating, yet there is love for the process.
- **PERCEPTION OF THE SCHOOL IN THE BROADER COMMUNITY:** There are reports that we are perceived as permissive, disorganized, unintentional, non-academic, and a holdover that is culturally out of step.
- **MONEY:** Talking about money is uncomfortable. Display of money is uncomfortable for some. Ways to recognize monetary generosity is problematic. Tuition is seen as getting too high. Tuition is seen as too low (causes a perception that Peninsula is not worth more).

### WHAT ARE FIVE WORDS THAT DESCRIBE PENINSULA?

This was a fun yet informative question to ask. Some of the most common responses are in parentheses. They are categorized under broader topics such as Community, Child-Centered, Freedom and Responsibility, Creative and Nature.

1. Community (democratic, unpretentious, humanizing, empathy, authentic, social justice, inclusive, caring, relationships)
2. Child-Centered (choice, engaging, student-directed learning, student voice, intentional, flexible, process, child)
3. Freedom and Responsibility (choice, beautiful chaos, risk, freedom and responsibility)
4. Creative (unique, fun, joy, mystery, wonder, creative)
5. Nature (dirty, messy, mud, trees, nature)

During these meetings, there were two observations that struck me and that I feel compelled to draw attention to. First, the ability to identify the core tenets of the school’s approach to education and values surrounding child development are intact across constituents. The radical philosophy of freedom of choice and responsibility works



*The Big Building, in festive attire, is a symbol of the strength of Peninsula's core values.*

extremely well and is broadly supported. I found some quotes to be powerful enough illustrations of this to stand on their own: "Being child-centered means empowering kids to make choices, even bad ones, and trusting them to learn from those choices." "Free choices allow students to marry a natural curiosity and intellectual rigor." "Autonomy can only be built through free time. Autonomy and making good choices must be practiced on a regular basis." "Choice allows students to work with their affinities and strengths and to build on them. It is focused on strengths not on deficits." "Education at Peninsula School looks chaotic because it's about relationships."

Second, I have yet to witness as dedicated and committed a parent body as I have witnessed at Peninsula. Parents seem as transformed by the school as their children. The parents appreciate the uniqueness of the school, the dedication of the teaching staff, and value being a member of a larger community of parents who share similar values such as social justice, equity and inclusiveness. One parent said to me, "The values of progressive education are not only good for education, they are good for the world." Another parent, channeling John Dewey, said, "Peninsula school is real life. It is not a simulation." Parents have a high understanding of the strengths of the school as well as the challenges, and, not being fair-weather friends, they are enthusiastic about jumping in to solve problems and tackle challenges. I was particularly impressed by the willingness of PALS from a vast range of graduating years to come meet with me.

Having had these meetings and immersing myself in the work of running the school since July, I fully expect to hear back from our very vocal community about the accuracy of what I've reported and commented on here. I invite you to send me an email with any perspective on which I missed the mark. [jim@peninsulaschool.org](mailto:jim@peninsulaschool.org)

I don't consider the job of listening and asking questions to end here or anytime in the future. Like many independent schools, Peninsula's philosophy requires several years of one's career to fully understand its subtleties and nuances. Being the head of an independent school demands open-minded and patient listening and persistence in asking challenging questions – familiar values of progressive education – in order to wisely lead the school into the future. I am looking forward to more listening and to deepening my understanding of this amazing place we call Peninsula School.

## ELEPHANT RESEARCH

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I worked closely with Dr. John Kioko, my research advisor, and a couple other students. A typical day involved waking up at 6:00am for a quick breakfast before packing the safari car with our field equipment. Every day I carried my lunch, binoculars, GPS locator, clipboard with data sheets, range finder, and other miscellaneous items. We spent a month recording data in Lake Manyara National Park, Manyara Ranch, and the adjacent community ranch.



We would drive through the landscape, torsos out of the top of the safari car, taking vegetation surveys, characterizing elephants, and documenting any other wildlife sharing the same habitat. Our team got really good at coordinating jobs, like who would be squinting into their binoculars and articulating what the recorder needed to write down. Another person would be noting the elephant track and the signs we encountered along the way. By the time we got back to camp, we were smiley, sun-kissed, and wind-blown. After our return, the least fun part for me was putting in the hours doing number crunching and statistical analysis (but it helped us understand what we were finding). Near the end of my time in Tanzania, I presented my research findings at an event open to locals who were interested in our work and its implications for them. During my presentation I had a Swahili translator and locals asked questions. Ultimately, I loved the research I did on African elephants. I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to go abroad and to do research with such a talented professional as Dr. Kioko. Furthermore, I'm grateful to have had such a great education that led me to where I am today. Although I am a traveler at heart, I will always return to Peninsula, the place where I grew up and a defining part of who I am.

## TONI OURADNIK

WE ARE PLEASED TO SHARE THAT Toni Ouradnik joined Peninsula's teaching staff this year as head teacher for the K/1 program. Toni comes to us from The Keys School in Palo Alto where she taught for 10 years as a K-4 Math and Science Teacher, designing and facilitating curricular units for children 5-12 years old. Prior to joining Keys she worked as a Naturalist at Pt. Bonita YMCA Outdoor Education Center, and Full Guide/Camp Staff at Sea Trek Ocean Kayaking Center. She holds a Masters of Art in Teaching, and a California CLAD credential, from the University of San Francisco. Her enthusiasm and genuine care for the children have made her a wonderful fit for Peninsula's K/1 class.

"I felt so welcomed and so taken care of, I couldn't imagine a better transition at this time in my career," Toni shared about joining the staff at Peninsula. She was impressed and happy to find that her colleagues are really and authentically kind. Nobody makes this more apparent than her assistants, Frank



and Camerina, as well as Chrissy and Tara in the afternoons. The authenticity among the teachers creates a comfortable classroom for the students too. She enjoys being able to give her kids the space and time to show what they can do when they are free to be themselves. Playing freeze tag with the kids running through the yard barefoot, passing the fairy houses that kids built, and jumping over a dirt pile – these are the moments that bring out the joy in the kids and Toni too.

Toni loves that the classroom and yard are their home, and that all together each day, her class are their own little community. Because of this community Toni could share anti-bias principles with the kids throughout the year. She is passionate about planting seeds and nurturing her student's thoughts about justice, each other, and the wider world. Having the freedom over her own class schedule makes room for Toni to be responsive to the needs of the kids in any given moment.

Toni feels a match between her ideas and the values at Peninsula, sharing, "I believe that social and emotional intelligence and growth of a child should be at the core of all education. We are more connected to our learning and growth when we are treated with respect, given autonomy and choice, and guided in the steps to build productive, authentic relationships. These essential elements are necessary for both the children and the adults in a learning community."

## LIVY SIEGEL

WE ARE EXCITED TO ANNOUNCE THAT our current head teacher in the 5th grade is no stranger to Peninsula School. Livy Siegel is a Peninsula graduate herself, and also got started in her teaching career as an assistant teacher in the upper school and teaching Summer School. During the 2010-2011 school year, Livy worked as an assistant in Peninsula's 6th grade and as the 5th grade assistant for the 2011-2012 year. During this time her leadership skills, insightful teaching style, and genuine connections with her students were obvious. Inspired to take on teaching as her career, Livy spent the next two years completing her single subject credential and master's degree in education at UC Berkeley. She shares that "through both practicum and academic classes, the program taught me an enormous amount about the creation of an equitable, engaging classroom that has been invaluable to me as a middle school teacher." As part of this program, Livy taught a mixed 10th/11th grade English course at a small,

progressive charter school in Alameda, and 6th grade media literacy at a traditional public school in Oakland. She then served as the 6th grade English teacher at Denali, the new middle school for Summit Public Schools before returning to Peninsula School.

Livy shared that she feels happy to be back in the progressive Peninsula upper school program, building an engaging curriculum with input from her colleagues and from her students. She has enjoyed creating her classroom environment and sharing this year with an amazing group of 5th graders. While not surprised by it, she is impressed and happy with the creative drive and many approaches students use to take on any assignment. She especially enjoyed the process for preparing for, planning, and then going on their first upper school camping trip this fall saying, "this class took advantage of everything camping had to offer making our trip above and beyond what I ever expected." In addition, Livy mentioned she was excited this past winter to work "on a fundraising and educational event for Ebola relief that the 5th graders had chosen to take on. This project



truly emerged entirely from student interest and a desire to learn more about the epidemic. I've been so impressed with their thoughtful research, energy, and global-mindedness throughout the entire process, and I felt privileged to be able to facilitate it." She looks forward to her tenure as a Peninsula teacher and building an engaging curriculum with the upper school team and with her students.

## AARON TINKER

FOR AARON TINKER, who became our Lower School Science teacher in January 2014, outdoor education, connection to nature, and marine science and conservation work are all long-standing passions. The strong thread which led to the wonderful fit as one of Peninsula's science teachers started with the wilderness out his back door as a kid. He credits his parents, who are both science educators to a range of ages, with leading him to love science and nature. His sparked interest ignited when, at 15, he worked studying sea turtles in Mexico under the tutelage of an inspiring woman with a PhD. He was hooked! He graduated from McGill University with a BS in Biology, and received his Masters in Marine Affairs from the University of Washington.

He met some Peninsula alumni along the way and was intrigued that these people would not stop bragging about their elementary school, AS ADULTS! When he and his wife checked it out, they saw why and decided to send their daughter here. When the science position opened, he knew he would love it. Aaron brought significant experience from his work at the Marine Science Institute (MSI) as instructor and crew aboard the 90' Research Vessel *Robert G. Brownlee*. He held that role from 2006 to 2013, teaching science to K-12 students through engaging, hands-on projects, using varying approaches for multi-faceted learning styles. Aaron's conservation work connected him to the Marine Conservation Biology Institute, World Wildlife Fund, and Native American Awareness Coalition, among others. This wealth of experience all

comes up in his exciting lessons and field trips here at Peninsula.

"Field trips are such incredible experiences . . . It is wonderful to see how much enthusiasm and energy the kids have for nature and the outdoors!" Aaron mentioned that on one such trip, he added an extra mile to a hike and not one student complained. He loves the encouragement of curiosity for



*Aaron leading an experiment in the Science Room for Activities.*



*Martha Portillo*

kids throughout the school, both on trips and on campus. Aaron noted it was unique to Peninsula how much attention was on each child, without being obtrusive. The excitement of the students and Aaron combine to create a great atmosphere for learning and caring about science. He believes in the "well-held space for kids to grow" at Peninsula and hopes to be a part of that for years to come.

## MARTHA PORTILLO

THE IMPENDING ARRIVAL of her first grandchild brought our new lower school Spanish teacher, Martha Portillo, to the Bay Area last summer, all the way from Dallas, Texas. Martha has really enjoyed making connections with students and learning how things work at Peninsula, and particularly loves the way children enthusiastically greet her as she arrives at their classrooms with a welcoming, "Hi Martha!"

For the past 23 years in Dallas, Martha taught Spanish at a Catholic school where, she says, the learning environment was much more traditional than what she finds at Peninsula. Excited by the opportunities and challenges of working in a new and different teaching environment, she was in full-fledged "learning mode" all fall, inspiring her to make adjustments to her teaching program. She is bringing more hands-on lessons to the classroom as well as seeing what emerges in her lessons and leaving space to be able to follow students' interests. Martha says she is really impressed with the balance of freedom and responsibility that children are given at Peninsula and that there is plenty of time for play, noting that this reminds her of how she raised her own children. Martha remarked that she has felt very supported by all of the classroom teachers,

citing their presence and involvement as a great help to her in acclimating to her new teaching role. When she is not teaching, Martha enjoys sewing, especially décor and accessories for baby's rooms, and of course, is really loving being a first time grandma to her new grandson and granddaughter.

## JOHN CHRISTIE

THE OPPORTUNITY to be the new 7th grade teaching assistant at Peninsula has lured alumni John Christie, back to the Bay Area. John, class of 2004, attended Colorado College in Colorado Springs where he received his B.A. with a major in Studio Arts and a minor in Latin American Studies. While living and going to school in Colorado, John developed and deepened his passions for environmental and social justice, playing guitar, teaching, growing food, hiking, and rock climbing. After graduating in 2013, John stayed on to continue playing and performing rock music with *The Jo(h)nband* whose album is slated for a summer release. Although life was good



John Christie

in Colorado, John says that the chance to teach at Peninsula was a significant factor in his returning to the area. Excited to explore his interest in education and teaching at a place he “knows and loves”, John is also eager to learn and understand all of the work that goes into creating the unique student experience at Peninsula. In addition, he is looking forward to opportunities to bring some of his many passions to the classroom.

Fond memories of John’s time as a student at Peninsula abound, especially of camping trips. It is probably no surprise then that he really enjoyed the first camping trip of

the school year with the 7th grade class. He noted that camping together helped everyone get to know each other and bond as a class. As John stated, “Peninsula had a big impact on my life, and really helped shape me as a person”. Now he is enjoying being a part of providing that important experience for our current 7th grade students.

## TARA SIMMS

TARA SIMMS, WHO ENJOYS skateboarding, snowboarding and whenever she has the time, “going into nature, alone, to wander,” became part of the Peninsula community last year as a parent in Josie’s class. This year she has joined both Betty’s and Toni’s classes as a teaching assistant. It was years ago, however, that Tara first came to Peninsula, on a quest to learn more about progressive education. Tara still remembers the first time she stepped on campus saying that there was “a thick sense of joy in the air” and that it “felt like home”. She also remembers feeling that she belonged here, and that someday she hoped to find herself teaching at Peninsula. At that time, Tara was an educator in a public school and had begun to feel that traditional school environments were lacking. Believing she could find an environment that would suit her better and offer her students more, she began avidly researching progressive education. What she discovered inspired Tara to start her own learning environment. For the next several years, Tara led and taught a completely outdoor Nature Immersion program for 3-7 year olds. While she loved her program, when she heard about the openings for a teaching assistant here, she knew the time was right to teach at Peninsula.

Tara has enjoyed the connections and relationships she has developed with students, as well as witnessing the deep bonds and relationships that her students have made with each other. She is surprised and moved by the emotional openness, empathy, and support that kids offer each other at Peninsula. Their unusual willingness to try new things and make mistakes also stands out to her. She believes that these qualities are likely a product of the intentional space that is created for



Tara Simms

risk taking, failure, and trying things outside of one’s comfort zone, thus challenging and creating personal growth. Next year, Tara will be spreading and sharing these ideas and experiences in her exciting new teaching position as the Education Specialist at Ocean Grove Charter School. We wish her well in this new venture, and are happy she will remain part of our community as a parent.

## FAMILIAR FACES IN NEW PLACES

SOME OF OUR PENINSULA STAFF changed their roles or moved around this year. Suman Kasturia is continuing her time in Nursery Blue, now as co-head teacher with Megan Hart. Scott McCracken moved from 5th grade head teacher to the Swing Teacher position. Susie Pickett, our Literacy Specialist, has additionally taken over as Specialty Math Teacher from Liz Caulkins who retired last year. We also have four assistants who changed and added classrooms. Chrissy Goewey is an assistant in both Nursery Blue and Toni’s class this year. David Rowe and Nancy Christie swapped places, so David is now back in Graceann’s and Nancy is in Andréa’s. Anne Adams continues to assist in Elizabeth’s and is working in Graceann’s this year too. The kids, parents and fellow staff love seeing these familiar faces around campus!



## ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

### Valerie Hoffman (in the 50's)

I went to Peninsula 1951-1952 when the Menlo Park schools were on triple session. I will never forget reading in the library, driving nails into the fence, being given piggyback rides, and making baskets and pottery. After 25 years in the film industry working as a story editor for Francis Coppola and an editor of creative properties at Lucasfilm (Star Wars and The Empire Strikes Back; wrote books, edited comics, magazines,



Valerie Hoffman

bubble gum cards), I went back to school and got a PhD in Psychology at Claremont Graduate University. That was followed by a three year postdoc at UCSF and the Center for AIDS Prevention Research/ Department of Epidemiology. I received a MPH in Epidemiology at Cal. Now I teach Psychology at San Jose State University and live in Los Gatos. I recently went back to visit Peninsula and was so impressed. It was just as I remembered it. I only wish someone had helped me understand the “regular” school I went to after Peninsula! I used to mumble to my friends, “This school just isn’t fun”.

### Andrea Wilson Wyszynski '66

I have 3 children, 2 grandchildren, and I own a web content writing company in Southern California.

### Shaun (Stallings) Anzaldua '74

I am living in Houston, and in business together with my brother Larkin Stallings. I



Peninsula School and Big Bertha in snow, 1962. Taken by Woody Nichols on the morning of January 21, 1962 before students arrived.



Beloved teacher Hanna Bergas working with kids circa 1970's.



Caroline Scott Sasko

have three teenagers, 2 dogs and 2 cats. I write and have my real estate license.

### Caroline Scott Sasko '79

Loved the Spring Fair (2014)! Everyone should go!

### Jennifer (Osborne) Canu '93

I am a Marriage and Family Therapist for Santa Cruz County, and happily married with 1 dog and 2 cats.

## SPRING FAIR REUNIONS

THE PRESENCE OF ALUMNI at the Spring Fair was noted by everyone! It was wonderful to see so many alums back enjoying old haunts, friends, and oobleck! More classes took us up on our Spring Fair reunion invitations than ever before. Four alumni classes worked on reunions, and although the class of '45 and '75 could not make it, they did get in touch. The classes of 1965/64, 1985, and 2005 showed up in force and with great spirit. Thanks to each of you for helping create the joyful mood of this year's Fair.

Many people mentioned enjoying conversations with the members of the class of 1965/64 telling them about the adventures from the good old days! The Class of 1985 celebrated their 30th over two days, and even tried to recreate an old class photo together. The class of 2005 broke our record for number of classmates attending a reunion with 18 out of 20, and also organized events over two days. The atmosphere was heavy with happy nostalgia among former classmates. These reunions offered some classmates the chance to visit with their teachers and friends parents and to introduce their kids and spouses to one another. Once again, I was reminded how lucky Peninsula School is to have decades of alumni who remember us fondly as an important part of their childhood.



The Class of 2005 visits at their 10th reunion by the 8th grade gazebo on Fair day.

*"It was so special not just to revisit all our old memories together but to hear about the new ones we have made since 8th grade graduation. Peninsula kids, and especially our class, have this timeless bond that I think will be with us forever." – Morgan Aitkin-Young*

If you are interested in planning a reunion for your class, we are happy to help you. We focus on the classes with multiples of 10 (the 6's are up next year), and we want to take special care for the 10th, 25th, and 50th reunions. We generally have reunions to coincide with the Spring Fair on the first Sunday in May, or in the summer. Contact Andromeda at [alumni@peninsulaschool.org](mailto:alumni@peninsulaschool.org) to help arrange yours.



The Class of 1965 and 1964 had a double 50th reunion, as they had shared many mixed grade level classes while at Peninsula.



Celebrating their 30th, the Class of 1985 poses on the logs by the twisty slide together.

*"The class of 1985 has held several reunions and stayed in touch over the years, but it was really special to come together for our 30th reunion this year at the Fair. So much of who I am today was shaped by my classmates during my time at Peninsula, and I feel so fortunate to still know them and count them among my friends!" – Kendra Armer*

IN MEMORIAM

**Margery “Jerry” Sherman Mecabe**

We are sad to share the news of the passing of one of our earliest alumna, Jerry Sherman Mecabe. She attended Peninsula in the early years, from 1927 to 1931. She died on July 23, 2014 at the age of 97, having lived a full and interesting life. Her friend contacted the school, knowing Jerry wanted to visit Peninsula and how important the school was to her. Jerry had been living in Larkspur, California and worked for years at San Quentin. She remembered her time at the Peninsula School fondly and often described the teaching philosophy to friends she made in her later years. Jerry’s mother, Dorothy Mecabe, was a teacher of the Fifth Group in the 20’s and early ’30’s. They knew the Duvenecks, and often spent time at Hidden Villa. Jerry continued a friendship with their daughter Hope Duveneck Williams that was life long. Jerry Mecabe’s strength and spirit will be missed.



*Jerry at a Peninsula Reunion.*

**Isabel Waters**

Isabel Waters, who was an assistant teacher in Jane Stallings class in 1966–67 passed away on May 23, 2014 at the age of 89. Her husband, Bill Waters, followed her on June 6, 2014. They were the parents of alumni Marie Waters Grady ’68 and Dan Waters ’68, and were living in a retirement community with many Peninsula family connections. Isabel will be remembered for her sense of humor and practical advice. We wish their family well.

**Iris Kriegler**

Iris Kriegler, Peninsula’s Librarian from 1970 to 1973, died on September 30th, 2014. She was also mother to three alumnae, Onie Kriegler ’76, Beth Kriegler ’81, and Julie Kriegler ’73, and one granddaughter, Zoe Rose Kriegler-Wenk ’10. She was much loved and stayed connected to our school community through the years. She passed away after a prolonged struggle with Alzheimer’s, surrounded by family and caretakers and a supportive community.



*Isabel Waters*



*Iris with granddaughter and alumna, Zoe Rose, dancing around the maypole.*



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*Peninsula now has a way to send many mailings to email addresses rather than through the post! Not only does this save us a stamp, but also helps us stick by our commitment to the environment. Some communications may still be sent out through the mail, but where possible we would love to conserve resources and send you an*

*email instead. In order to make this work, we need accurate email addresses for people not currently at school (alumni, parents of alumni, grandparents, and former staff members). Please go to our form online to update your contact info with us or call us at 650-325-1584, ext. 33. Thank you so much!*

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*Please contact Andromeda at [andromeda@peninsulaschool.org](mailto:andromeda@peninsulaschool.org) for more information about the articles, if you need additional copies of News Notes, hope to add someone to the mailing list, or no longer wish to receive future mailings from us.*

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