



# alumni NEWS

SPECIAL 25th ANNIVERSARY EDITION



## Schoolhouse Rocks!

Chalk it up to the loyal alumni who turned out in droves, the buzz in and around the new play yard, or even the decadent frosted cupcakes—Little School's 25th anniversary celebration was a unequivocal success. More than 600 visitors, including past and current students and their families, turned out to reunite with old friends, honor their faithful teachers, and celebrate the quarter-century milestone of their preschool alma mater. During the party, young alums swarmed the chalkboard wall outside the Sky Room to scribble nostalgic messages, proving once again just how passionate and expressive—and how eager to leave their mark—Little School grads truly are. For more party coverage, see page 8.

# Keeping Pace with a Changing World



Our 25th anniversary has been an occasion for both joyous celebration and sober reflection about the state of the school 25 years into our institutional life. I've had my share of both.

I had a day of pure joy at the 25th anniversary. Several people commented how lucky Little School was to have such long-tenured staff and stable leadership. I do believe the school had benefited greatly, but some of my reflection has been on the potential downside of decades-long leadership. With such continuity, is there a danger of getting stuck in our ways?

A few years ago, I bumped up against my own potential for holding the school back when some of my newer staff suggested we re-examine our response to children who expressed gender fluidity. At the time, my approach to gender roles and sexual orientation would be considered progressive, yet I was uncomfortable with the idea that gender might be fluid. Still, I was intrigued that my teachers had raised the topic, and I started paying attention. I spoke with college students who were convinced that gender was an artificial construct, like race. I watched a TV documentary about seemingly trans-gendered children. I talked with parents of such children, as well as adults who had been those children. By the time teachers Mary Belton and Melodie Younce did a staff workshop on gender identity and fluidity, I was ready for change. And so was the staff.

To prevent possible stagnation, many of us have made a commitment to keep our ears and minds open. The board of directors, in its infinite wisdom, has supported this effort. My sabbatical five years ago allowed to me to explore new developments in education. Conferences and workshops provided the staff with similar growth op-

portunities. Even the experience of writing *Including One, Including All* (page 12) allowed Todd and I to learn more about what others do, and about what we still want to accomplish at Little School.

Inspiration comes from the current interests, knowledge and curiosity of our staff and parents. Over a year ago, teacher Jetta Jacobsen led a staff workshop on English-language learners. Encouraged by parent Marivi Lerdo, I started a dialog with Bethica Quinn, director of Spanish-immersion preschool Centro Las Olas, about how to support bi-lingual, bi-cultural children. Last fall, when parents on the Diversity Committee named supporting home languages their No. 1 concern, we were ready. The parents and staff, led by Jetta, are embarking on a project to bring into the classroom stories, songs, word lists and even volunteer speakers that represent the languages spoken at home.

Tim Treadway doesn't need outside inspiration to stay fresh. We have all watched in awe as he's created evocative art projects with children. The yard design gave him a larger canvas on which to paint his ideas about how children grow through their interactions with a play environment (page 10).

Cassie Britton finds inspiration through her work with individual children, their parents and specialists. She recently has become interested in how one's sensory processing system impacts social relationships, emotional regulation and academic learning. Last summer she led a staff workshop about supporting children's symbolic development, a precursor to higher-level thinking and learning.

Others find that trying on a new hat can help them gain a fresh perspective. As a relatively new member of the MFAM team, Trina Matthews has been fascinated by MFAM's emphasis on emergent curriculum. Sarita Escobar has moved from MFPM to join Jennifer Digioia in TK; both are invigorated by the change, and the children are enjoying new elements added to the already rich program. Mica Saldivar and Mary Belton were starting from scratch when they took over MFPM,

and they have since introduced many new practices, such as the Community Word Rocks and School to Home Bunny.

We have also been reinvigorated by environmental change. If the yard and middle classroom renovations weren't enough, we were treated by parents Elizabeth Spokes and Ann Roberts to the refurbishment of the office and the creation of a beautiful new staff lounge.

Finally, there has been emotional rejuvenation. I don't know one long-time staffer who didn't go home higher than a kite after our open house. Reconnecting with former students and their families brought an unexpected bounty. Hopefully, we will see more of you as the year goes on. We can now chat with you on Facebook, thanks to alumna Laurie Russell, who

tracked down may of you.

In Extended Day recently, I came upon three girls and a boy planning dramatic play:

First Girl: "Alexander, you are the only boy so you have to be the king." www Boy, resigned: "OK. If I have to."

Leslie: "You don't have to be the king. You could be the..."

First Girl: "Yeah, sometimes my boy friend is a princess when we play. So you could be a princess."

Second Girl: "Yeah, and girls can marry girls, and boys can marry boys."

Third Girl: "Yeah, you can be anything you want. One boy in my class wears dresses 'cause he likes them. And some days he chooses a girl's name."

So, some of us may be getting a little grayer around the edges. But as long as we rely on our faculty, parents, alumni, and yes, even our students to lead us down new pathways, Little School will remain an innovative, ever-evolving, and enjoyable institution.

*Leslie*

Leslie Roffman  
Director

*Many of us have made a commitment to keep our ears and minds open.*

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## A Few of Our Favorite Things...

When kids graduate from Little School, they take with them a multitude of enriching experiences. Aside from their favorite teachers and classmates, the stuff that tends to fill alumni's fondest memories are objects and traditions that have been in Little School's repertoire for quite some time. For instance, the Sky Chair (left), which has been swinging around for years, has been a source of fun and laughter for hundreds of children. Among the other quintessentially "Little School" experiences (below, clockwise from top left): Tim's amazing stick houses, classroom murals (here, the 2008 YMWF project), the TK play, and the woods program.





*Little School's very first class of graduates, pictured here with Tim and Leslie.*

# The Little School that Could

*From its humble beginnings in 1984, Little School has come a long way.*

When Little School held its 25th anniversary party last October, students, parents and teachers from throughout the school's illustrious history gathered to share memories and reconnect. There was so much to celebrate: a new yard, an upcoming book release, staff milestones. But most of all, it was a time to rejoice in the school's remarkable quarter-century journey. From its humble beginnings as a one-room school in 1984, Little School has overcome obstacles and persevered through several twists of fate over the past 25 years, ultimately landing as one of the most beloved and influential preschools in the nation. Here, teacher **Todd Wanerman**, who at the anniversary party was honored for his 20-year tenure, offers an historical lowdown for the fans of this venerable institution.

## **A Room With a Viewpoint: 1984-1985**

The Little School began when Tim Treadway and Leslie Roffman, who had worked together at the Jewish Community Pre-

school and the Infant Development Center, set out to create a program of their own. They wanted to create a school where all children would feel welcome and accepted, gain insight into themselves and others, and build their own learning experiences with the support of playful, insightful teachers.

In 1984, Treadway and Roffman opened the school as a morning class in a room at the Richmond District Community Center for 12 toddlers, ages 2 and 3. Their devoted time to children's free exploration and play. They chose curriculum materials that met the children's diverse developmental and intellectual needs and embraced the students' own ideas. They developed their unique style of paying close attention to children, cultivating great affection and respect, fostering acceptance of both triumph and challenge, and most of all partnering with the children in their play and inquiry.

"In some sense," Leslie recalls, "Tim and I started Little School because it sounded like a fun idea... We wanted to create a school that was joyful, where children

[could] experiment and construct their own knowledge, where teachers and kids formed partnerships to discover exciting things about the world together, where respect and investment in the community and the individual was given, where conflict resolution and problem solving were an integral part of the curriculum."

## **Family Affair: 1985-1989**

The school faced the first of several upheavals just one year into its evolution when Leslie and Tim lost their space in the community center. Through some lucky connections they met John and Ellen Sanger, who offered the basement of their home on Washington Street as a new site. Tim transformed the space into classrooms virtually on his own, and the school banked on their early success and the support of the parent community to not only maintain but expand the school community through the transition. The Sangers proved to be key allies and friends to the school as it grew. "John Sanger was an attorney," Leslie

recalls. "He got us our non-profit status and gave us advice to start the board. The Sangers were so pivotal. And they were so personally supportive."

As the original students matured, Leslie and Tim expanded the program to serve 4-year-olds in the afternoon. This change led to the hiring of Cassie Britton, a young



*"Cassie had innovations," Leslie recalls.*

teacher whose experience and outlook complemented the school's. Cassie applied great passion and insight to the program, and quickly took on a leadership role. "Cassie had innovations," Leslie remembers. "Community meeting and small group were Cassie ideas. She brought in the writing center and put it near the big blocks. And she brought the whole idea of writing down kids' words and making signs. And woodworking." Leslie and Cassie began to form their partnership as executive director and program director that has guided the school ever since.

The school's four years at the Sangers' played a huge role in its growth. During this time the program began to attract widespread interest and respect within the community. Having their own site to develop and operate freely gave Leslie, Tim and Cassie the chance to create the basic structures and traditions that make Little School what it is today. The Sanger years also marked the arrival of Lisa Treadway, who continues as a teacher and administrator, and Dawn-Monique del Bonis, who played a major role as teacher and administrator for more than a decade.

The school's tenure at the Sangers' came to a fairly rapid, but amicable close when the Sangers' daughter Kate graduated. "They were ready to have their house become a private home again," Leslie said.

## **Seismic Changes: 1990-1995**

In 1989, near the end of their tenure at Washington street, Cassie and Leslie

were relaxing with the last few students on site at 5 p.m. when the Loma Prieta Earthquake struck. Although no one was injured, and the earthquake had no impact on their building, the event would prove to be a fortuitous in the school's search for a permanent home. Less than two miles away, the venerable St. Rose School, on Pierce and Pine Streets, run by the Dominican order in the shadow of St. Dominic's church, suffered such severe structural damage that it was forced to close. Across the street, a large two-story building that occupied half a block and housed offices, a cafeteria and an athletic yard, remained unscathed. In the chaos surrounding the closure of the school, the administrators of the Dominican order couldn't decide what to do with the building.

Enter Jody Jahn, Little School parent and prime player in the school's search for a new home. Jody, along with her fellow parents on the search team and the Little School staff, negotiated a one-year lease on the site, known as Rose Court. The interior was a long, L-shaped series of spacious classrooms with high arch windows, hardwood floors and carved moldings. A vast (by city standards) play yard sat inside the court made by the building, protected from the elements. Tim built a large sandbox and climbing structure to occupy the center of the yard, and worked his magic on the interior space. The school was poised for its second renaissance.

During this period, Little School grew considerably. The size of the Rose Court put the school's plans for expanded course offerings on a fast track. Enrollment jumped to 107 children, and Little School established the class schedule that remains in use today. It also began to offer early-morning and late-afternoon care for children of working families. The school also welcomed new teachers, including Janna Masia Barkin, who helped to develop the 4- and 5-year-old program with Cassie; Todd Wanerman, who was assigned to teach the younger 2- and 3-year-old classes with Leslie; and

Sarita Escobar, who began teaching the first five-day extended care program, then later went on to teach the TK children.

Also during this time, the parent board of directors formed its current executive and committee structure. With the program relatively set, the school leadership was able to focus on other strategic goals, such as increasing the funds for financial aid and launching a summer program. Leslie regretfully left her role as teacher in order to oversee the program full-time.

While the Rose Court site allowed Little School to blossom, it was never a stable home. The Dominicans were aware that new seismic-safety regulations, which the city announced unexpectedly in summer 1994, would require major building renovations. Once again without a home, Little School bought time by installing portables in the Rose Court parking lot and continuing to use the yard. But as the 1994-1995 school year unfolded, the school leadership realized it had to secure a permanent home once and for all.

It was a frantic, sometimes comical time. Staff and board alike looked into vacant school sites, church basements, even disused medical or industrial spaces. Hopes ran high for a brief time that the school could move into one of the buildings in the Presidio, then on the eve of privatization. While the search fostered new heights of camaraderie and dedication among the Little School community, there was also a sense that, in city's limited real-estate market, finding a suitable new home would be difficult.

## **Home at Last: 1996 to the Present**

At the 11th hour, the search committee found the ideal space just half a mile away from Rose Court. The St. Benedict's



*There's no place like home: Little School moves to Lyon Street in 1996.*

Parish for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired on Lyon Street, owned and once operated by the Archdiocese of San Francisco, had fallen into disuse, and the Archdiocese was looking to unload the property. The site, which had been built at midcentury as a gymnasium and community center, was the perfect size and shape—a large, open rectangle with high ceilings and mezzanines at the edges—and constructed of sturdy steel-reinforced concrete.

The challenge was the cost of purchasing and renovating the new space. In order to refurbish the interior and play yard, the school needed to raise \$1.3 million! The community came together in an extraordinary fashion, and gifts from many families helped realize the school's dream. Award-winning architect (and Little School parent) Mark Horton partnered with the staff to create the school's unique space. A curved wall was built through the center of the building, and ceilings were suspended from this main structure to create intimate classroom space. The recesses in the curve brought light from the high skylights above into the classroom space. The flow of the curve created a communal entrance and gathering area, as well as a large multi-use gross motor space (the Skyroom). The removal of an historic outbuilding and the installation of a sandbox and climbing structure created a new yard.

This permanent home provided a lasting foundation upon which the school has continued to evolve. After relocating the Lyon Street the school added its Transitional Kindergarten class, a five-day program built around the arts. In 1999,

the school crafted a five-year strategic plan with a focus on three goals: continuing to improve program quality and creativity, expanding the program's accessibility to the city's diverse families, and committing to the inclusion of children with and without developmental differences.

Perhaps the most significant project the school undertook in regard to the first goal was a second capital campaign in 2003 that focused on creating an endowment fund. One of the very few preschool endowments in the country, it provides the school with the resources to retain teaching talent and continually improve its programs. As has been the case throughout the school's existence, the response and support of current and alumni parents and the surrounding community was exceptional. The endowment also enabled the school to take on a complete renovation of its outdoor space last summer (see yard story, page 10).

The school has also undertaken several efforts to fulfill the goal of increased access and diversity. A parent-staff committee began steering this objective last year. Since then, the school has obtained several substantial financial awards that will provide tuition reduction for children of working or at-risk families, and children from parts of the community traditionally most impacted by discrepancies in school success. Each year the school dedicates two major in-house fundraising efforts toward its financial aid fund. In addition, the school has significantly increased its outreach to and enrollment of families from different cultural, racial, socioeconomic

backgrounds and family structure. And the school has expanded its full-time program to accommodate up to 40 children on different days and two full-time staff—a far cry from seven children three afternoons a week when the program began in 1990.

Little School's commitment to inclusion—the third goal in the strategic plan—has been evolving for more than 20 years. Through the guidance of Leslie and Cassie, and the support of a growing network of specialists, the Little School has gained respect for its unique relationship-based, individualized approach to supporting the strengths and challenges of a wide range of children, including those with developmental, learning, or behavioral differences. And Little School is increasingly recognizing a growing public purpose that extends beyond its own walls. In 2004 it released a teacher-training film, *Relationships: The Key to Teaching and Learning in the Early Years*, a primer in the school's use of engagement (among teachers, parents and children) as the springboard of individualized learning. On the heels of this project, several Little School teachers began presenting workshops on the school's approach at conferences around the country. At one such workshop, Cassie, Leslie and Todd were approached by Redleaf Press, the most established national publisher of teacher-training titles, to write a book on inclusion. *Including One, Including All: A Relationship-based Guide to Early Childhood Inclusion*, was released this winter and has already met with rave reviews (see book story, page 12).

—Todd Wanerman

# You Must Remember This...

*Teachers reminisce about their favorite Little School moments.*

With our talented team of teachers logging in an impressive 195 years of combined experience at The Little School, we figured they must have some cherished memories to dust off and share. So we took to the classrooms and posed the question, "What is your favorite Little School memory?" Their colorful answers are varied in mood and tale, yet each is rich in texture as it creates a memorable mosaic of Little School history and once again reminds how much we love our teachers.

"One of my favorite memories so far," says newest teacher, **Bonnie Reid** (Extended Day), "was the first time I put one of the children to sleep. Learning the nuances of a simple foot rub or lullaby has been such a beautiful part of my experience at Little School. I so distinctly remember the first time, nestled in my arms, I saw a certain pair of eyes flutter, followed by a gentle head nod, and easing their warm body into their bed I felt so blessed to have this be a part of my everyday."

"One memory that comes to mind," recalls **Sotweed Schneible** (MFAM), "occurred several summers ago at the soon-to-be-gone favorite woods destination, Sand Hill. A couple of girls were climbing on the beloved climbing stump while I stood at the base where there is an 8-foot drop to the sand. There are usually logs and sticks covering this part, so kids can climb down them. As I was looking for the best place to climb up to spot the kids, I heard a slipping sound. I spun around just in time to catch the girl who fell face first from a standing position atop the stump. As I put the unharmed girl down, her friend exclaimed 'Wow, Sotweed, you're just like a Superhero!'"

Program Director **Cassie Britton** delights us with romantic trivia. "I remember getting married on the playground of The Little School when we were in Rose Court and having the reception in my classroom! Leslie got her universal life ministry license and officiated, and led an incredibly moving ceremony. My parents walked me down the aisle (right past the sand box) into my husband Kevin's arm as Louis Armstrong sang 'Be my life's companion and we'll never grow old.'"

"Favorite" isn't the best word to describe this memory, notes **Lisa Treadway** (OTTH/OMWF), "but here is something that touched me deeply: In spring 2006, I became very sick and was on disability for months. During that difficult time, our family was in need of support. Up stepped the Little School community, in ways that were so loving, generous, abundant and caring that I am still moved to tears as I write this, three years later. Words are inadequate to express both the depth of my appreciation and the impact that support had on my family and me. The Little School community surrounded us, held us, loved us, and nurtured us."

"There have been many moments when I have been amazed and delighted by life at The Little School, comments **Tim Treadway** (OTTH/OMWF). "The moment I'm thinking of now is when a parent came to visit our new, very 'little' school at the Richmond Community Center site where we first started. I had to tell her that our lease had just been canceled and that we probably wouldn't be offering any spots for the coming year. She responded, 'I'd like to have your school at my house...if you are interested.' The Little School spent the next five years housed in Ellen and John Sanger's basement."

"My most memorable experience," reminisces **Trina Matthews** (MFAM), "is going camping each year with the kids and families. I enjoy singing with the kids by the camp fire, watching the kids roasting marshmallows, showing off their hiking skills and roaming from tent to tent, as well as parents bonding and everyone waking up to hot cocoa as we begin to close out our year together. What better way to bond than to have one big sleepover!"

**Jetta Jacobson** (MFAM) remembers one year when "no matter how much we tried, we could not get a campsite anywhere. After much effort we finally secured a place on Mt. Diablo. The children were thrilled and the parents gung ho. Then

everything went wrong. A truck carrying fish parts fell on its side, covering the Bay Bridge in fish and backing traffic up for hours. Parents arrived exhausted, but in good spirits. We then discovered rattlesnakes all around the edges of the campsite and had to place our tents, literally touching each other around the campfire. Then as soon as it became dark, the raccoons began descending upon us, shrieking and jumping. One even went into a tent and stole a backpack. We were up all night, but we all went home laughing. It was an adventure not easily forgotten."

**Todd Wanerman** (YTTH/YMWF) remembers a little girl named Charlotte, who told him, when he asked the class what they wanted to be when they grew up, that she was going to be a teacher. "Last year," says Todd, "Charlotte's mother



*Jetta and her little adventurers in the Presidio.*

contacted us to ask if Charlotte and her friend Emily, who had been in the same class, could help out one day. Megan and I happily accepted. Charlotte and Emily were now 8-year-olds and they took their job very seriously. They conferred with each other and gave each other pointers and didn't let up for a moment. They came back this fall and put in yet another day of dedicated work. We agreed that it would now be a tradition to have the girls help us out at least once a year until they are old enough for us to hire them!"

—Naomi Galley

## Dig In!

*Community planting will help Little School give back.*



Later this year, the entire Little School family—staff, kids and their caregivers—is invited to celebrate 25 years by giving back to the greater community, especially the beautiful public outdoor spaces that have contributed to the Little School's program over the years. A community planting or similar community-enhancing activity will take place somewhere in the Presidio or at Crissy Field, sites where the woods program, camping expeditions and summer programs have been held for many years. "We'll do whatever kid-friendly tasks the [department of parks and recreation] think are helpful to the upkeep, maintenance or beautifying of these places," says Wendy Yanowitch, chair of the 25th anniversary committee. "They will give us something that needs to be done, such as helping to plant or weed" in a part of the beautiful Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Inspired by the MFAM and MFPM woods curriculum and spearheaded by Little School parent Amy Metzler Ritter, the event will take place sometime this spring, so stay tuned for details.

# Schoolhouse Rocks!

Little School celebrated its 25th birthday last October with an abundance of friends, food and fun. More than 600 guests, including current and past families, squeezed into an old-fashioned photo booth and posed for goofy amusement-park-style snapshots. They chatted with old pals and teachers, munched on birthday cake, signed their names on a networking wall, and viewed archival photos from the school's illustrious history. Children ran around in faces painted with butterflies and dolphins, rolled around in the new play yard, and decorated tiles that would later become part of an outdoor mosaic.

"This is a year to reflect on our past and look forward to our future," said Director Leslie Roffman, who took

the podium in the Skyroom following the percussion offerings of teacher Todd Wanerman and his son Arlo. "A day like today wouldn't have happened without the dedication of so many people, without their willingness to dedicate their time, their talents and energy—whether it was playing guitar or helping to build this building, or putting on the party."

"Look how far we've come," said former parent John Sanger, whose house became Little School's home from 1985 to 1989. "Leslie and Tim started this school in the basement of a house, and now just look at us."

Teachers were honored for their dedication. Jennifer Digiorno and Megan London were awarded hero badges for five years of service. Sotweed Schneible was recognized for 10 years of "teaching children how to be the best they can be," said Roffman. And in thanking Wanerman for 20 years of "devoting himself to the lives of young children," the community paraded him around the room in a painted chair.

Roffman said the reconnections that were made with alumni surrounding this event were crucial, and that she hoped those friendships would flourish. "We're starting to realize how we can find you, our alumni community. We are finding ways to pull you in and keep those relationships going." At least for another 25 years.

—Maryann LoRusso



# The Changing of the Yards

*Students dive into Little School's inspiring new outdoor play space.*

By the time Little School students had returned from summer break, they found their beloved yard had metamorphosed into an even bigger, bolder, more sophisticated version of itself. Minutes after the first preschoolers filed into the Sky Room, little faces were already pressing against the new glass doors that would serve as the main entrance to the new outdoor space, eager to get a first look at the wonders they would soon get to explore for themselves. And there was so much to take in: An enticing new bamboo garden to explore. A “wiggle stream” that promised endless water play. A four-seated rocking apparatus that could be shared with friends. A sandbox deck with a cargo net for limitless imaginative play. An enormous rock for scaling new heights. And of course, beautiful new plant life to nurture.

During the first few weeks after the yard's unveiling, the reactions from children were colorful, as to be expected.

“It's like Disneyland with water!”

“Wait, what happened to the other climbing stuff?”

“Cool! A rock we can climb on and jump off of!”

The observations were not only a glimpse into the playful nature of kids,

but also an indication of how vested Little School children are in their environment, how they soak up the excitement surrounding positive changes at school, and how safe they feel expressing their feelings about those changes.

As this newsletter went to press, the school community was continuing to discover the many aspects of the new yard and enjoying the final additions to the space, which was conceived by the architect Mark Horton (who also designed Little School's interior space after the school relocated to the current Lyon Street building more than a decade ago). A bamboo deck and a tree grove were some of the more recent unveilings that provided children with new visual perspectives and opportunities for dramatic play. The Yellow Building, which prior to last summer was a dilapidated landmark, has evolved into a clean, sunny Exploration Room, complete with clipboards, writing and craft materials, magnifying glasses and treasure collectors, and other items to support full engagement in the yard. In this quiet space children can explore the arts, meet in small groups or enjoy quiet time with teachers. A small matted area at the back of the house serves as “Sensory Room,” complete with sky chairs and

*Every child wants to get a piece of the rock, left. At right, kids work the popular Wiggle Stream.*

other hanging elements.

Little School Director Leslie Roffman says the new yard is overflowing with opportunities for children to learn and explore. “They can run, climb, jump, push, pull, rock, swing, hang, crouch, crawl, roll, throw, kick, bike, balance and more, on different surfaces, from different surface angles and using different techniques.” She says some of the physical opportunities are prescribed (“There is probably only one way children are going to use the four-seated Crazy Daisy”), while others offer unlimited possibilities. For example, children can use the moveable planters to create houses, barriers or obstacle courses, and the hill, says Roffman, “invites innumerable ways to move your body. It was our intention to include as many of these open-ended physical invitations as possible.”

Roffman says the space was also designed to provide physical challenges and “create physical risks that are both exciting and safe.” Kids have been testing their skills and meddle by climbing or jumping off the rock, running or rolling down the hill, and trying to drive tricycles through the sand.

There are plenty of cognitive challenges

*The space was designed to provide physical risks that are both exciting and safe.*

as well, and the wiggle stream is an example of how small children learn through hands-on exploration with their environment. Leslie says she's observed junior engineers trying to figure out how the water flows and stops, how to extend the stream, how to change the direction of water flow, and whether or not it's possible to saturate the sand enough to turn it into liquid.

Anyone who's seen the children playing “pirates” or “house” in the new yard know that many of its structures beautifully support symbolic play. Says Roffman, “You won't find a cave or castle or boat, although elements of the yard suggest [those objects],” says Roffman. “The sandbox deck, with its cargo net, suggests bad guys making a quick getaway. The rock offers a

feeling of power and risk-taking. The bamboo grove offers the safety, reassurance and privacy that being sheltered by trees can offer.” The moveable planters will be repotted throughout the year with everything from beanstalks to hidden thickets, allowing children to continually “re-create their own physical accompaniment to their symbolic world. Lined up, they make a fort or barrier. In a square shape, they provide a home or hideout.”

The space is also filled with sensory stimulations and the pleasures of nature. “Just in terms of touch, children can experience tree bark, bamboo stalk, fine-grained sand, large-grained sand, turf, resilient matting, wood, concrete, stone, water, soft, fuzzy plants, smooth flexible plants and crumbly leaves,” says Roffman. They can experience different smells, such as the lavender in the garden, and various visual perspectives, from the sculpture that changes color in the light and the visual sundial on the wall of the building, to the views of the treetops from the top of the tree deck. Finally, says Roffman, “we are excited about the Sensory Room, where children will be able to wrestle, bounce, swing and feel the full joy of their bodies in movement.”

—Maryann LoRusso



## Thinking Outside the Sandbox

*Teacher Tim Treadway talks to parent Maryann LoRusso about Little School's outdoor remodel*

**ML:** So far, what is your favorite part of the new yard?

**TT:** It's hard to say because I feel so invested in all of it. As much as I love the bamboo forest and the tree fort, for me it's the Wiggle Stream. From the onset we had every kid in the school exploring it simultaneously. But no child can own the stream, because there are so many ways to use it. Some children are building dams, and others are trying to flood it with as much water they can collect in pails, trying to increase the volume of the water going down. It's working out very democratically. But at the beginning, [when I noticed its popularity], there was a point I was worried that the Wiggle Stream was going to be the sole focus of the new yard.

**ML:** Has it been?

**TT:** Pretty much every kid is still using it. But when we got the rock, the children were all over the rock. Another [popular activity] is playing “fairies” in the bamboo forest. Now we're really seeing kids spreading out and enjoying all parts of the yard.

**ML:** What has been the most interesting reaction you've gotten from a child?

**TT:** A couple of kids have asked me, “Where is the old yard?” And I had to stop and think about what they were asking me. I realized they wanted to know where the old yard went, because in their memory it exists in the same space.

**ML:** Did the image of this yard exist in your imagination, back in the early days of Little School?

**TT:** We've always wanted to have a yard like this. Our first yards always had concrete, and now, to have as much sand and turf as we have, is great. This yard has more dynamics to it. And we've got so much more space that bigger groups of kids can play out there.

**ML:** Besides being enjoyed by larger groups, what other ways will the space enhance the Little School experience?

**TT:** Our curriculum always had an element of nature, from the woods program to yard play. The new yard offers the

opportunity for many more outdoor activities right here at school. In front of the yellow building a deck will be for planting and woodworking. Kids can go out and enjoy the deck, or the terrace garden that comes down from the hill, at the moment full of different herbs and plants with smells. We now have a field, which [previously was] a slanted concrete driveway, where kids can play soccer. In the past, we would build a homemade water course in the warm seasons, but now water play is an option pretty much every day. Even when they're inside in the Sky Room, children will be able to look out and see the rain, see what's happening out in the world, because of the big glass doors

The yellow building, which includes two rooms and a bathroom, will add dimension to what the teachers can already do with a smaller group of kids. We have indoor/outdoor space, with the doors open so kids can come and go. There will be building materials and a nature/art room where we can bring nature in from outside and do art projects. The back room, the “Sensory Room,” is a quieter space with fewer distractions.

**ML:** It seems like you brought a lot of the indoors to the yard.

**TT:** There's essentially nothing indoors that can't be brought out, but it doesn't necessarily work the other way around. In designing the yard, we conceptualized the various parts as if they were classrooms—for example, the sandbox and tree deck we thought of as a room with a hill. This helped us plan how we were going to use each area to the fullest.

**ML:** Why is outdoor time during the school day essential?

**TT:** Kids automatically own the outdoors, whereas inside the school building they are limited by more defined rules. Outside, children can test their meddle. A child who falls inside is so much more apt to pick himself up and keep on running when they're outside, because there's so much joy, so much more emotion and intensity. An outdoor space is just a great place to observe children.

# Where Are They Now?

*Catching up with former Little School staff and students.*

Many talented teachers and inspiring students have walked through Little School's various doors over the years, whether they were coming to the Richmond Community Center, climbing down to the Sangers' basement, or punching the key pad at the front door at the current Lyon Street location. Since Little School's inception in 1984, so many dedicated and diverse teachers have joined the faculty ranks, each bringing their unique gifts to the school and adding to our collective knowledge and practice. Similarly, Little School has touched the lives of so many children, who have since gone on to experience new schools, jobs and other growth opportunities. A few alumni contacted us through our 25th Anniversary Facebook page to share where they are now, send in memories and congratulate Little School on its 25th birthday.

As these teachers and students moved on to new chapters of their lives, they took with them pieces of Little School, including an ongoing sense of connection to our community. Some of these extraordinary individuals wrote and shared with us what they've been up to since saying good-bye to Little School.

## TEACHERS

**Niki Banffy-Nesbitt, MFAM teacher:** Niki retired from teaching to become a full-time artist and now lives in Berkeley. "I feel very bonded in spirit to the Little School staff that I loved so much," she writes. "Little School cornered the market on amazing, caring teachers."

**Ellen Baker, office manager:** Ellen retired five years ago to care for her seriously ill husband. "I honed my nursing and nurturing skills, seeing David through a myriad of surgeries and other health issues," she says. Thankfully her husband is now well, and Ellen spends time reading, renewing old friendships (via email and Facebook), caring for the animals who reside in her backyard, working the occasional catering job, and planning her daughter's upcoming wedding. "It has become a very Zen-like, introspective retirement," she says.

**Janna Barkin, MFAM teacher, St. Rose location:** One of Little School's first teachers, Janna now lives in Novato with her husband, Gabe, and daughters, Emily and Amaya. After departing Little School, Janna continued teaching for more than

15 years, then branched out and studied childbirth education. After the birth of her second daughter she deepened her commitment to yoga and now teaches to both adults and children. She specializes in preschool yoga circles, as well as prenatal and mom-and-baby yoga classes.

**Elizabeth Cambier, MFAM teacher:** Elizabeth is currently living and working in Seattle.

**Dawn-Monique Elkin, MFAM teacher:** Dawn-Monique lives in San Ramon with her husband, Christopher, and their children, Dakota, Avery and Sage. She received her California Multiple K-8 Teaching Credential and is now teaching first grade at Creekside Elementary School in Danville, a public school focused on technology and the New York Reading/Writing project.

**Becky Friedman, MFAM and TK teacher:** Becky left Little School for adventures in New York. "I still have such warm feelings for Little School," she says. "I learned so much during that time, and had such incredible growth." Becky is currently living in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and works as a writer and producer for the television production company Out of the

Blue, which created *Blues Clues*. Becky is currently working on the PBS show *Super Why*, where she puts "everything I learned at Little School to good use." In her spare time, Becky writes for a company that creates mystery birthday parties for kids, practices and teaches yoga, and runs the New York City Marathon.

**Laura Galvin, MFAM teacher:** "I remember fondly my time at Little School," says Laura, who is now has five grandchildren. "I'm happy to say that I still have young children in my life, as well as three sons and three lovely daughters-in-law."

**Jaqi Garcia, support teacher:** Jaqi is at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Potrero Hill working toward a master's degree in traditional Chinese medicine. Jaqi is learning a form of qigong/tai chi called swimming dragon, as well as tai chi sword form, and she performed at the ODC theater last December. Last year Jaqi traveled around the world, and her destinations included Hawaii, Europe, India, Manila and Nepal, where she stayed at Buddhist monasteries and visited a preschool in a little mountain village near the Himalayas.

**Samantha Gray-young, MWF and TTH teacher:** After leaving Little School, Samantha worked as a substitute teacher at schools around San Francisco. The flexibility offered her an opportunity to travel and spend several months in Spain. She then went on to teach at a co-op, Pacific Primary Preschool, and is currently on staff at Peter's Place. Samantha wrote to us saying, "I still think fondly of the gang over at Little School, especially sharing laughs with Todd over the hilarious antics of those youngest twos and threes."

**Chad Kordt-Thomas, OMWF and MFPM teacher:** Chad is an early-childhood mental-health consultant at Parents Place, Jewish Family and Children's Services, in San Mateo. He is also part of a child and family psychotherapy practice in San Francisco, specializing in working with children of all ages with learning and developmental delays.

**Gigi Khalsa, TK teacher:** After leaving Little School, Gigi went on to teach kindergarten and first grade at Garfield Charter School in Menlo Park. Then she earned her MA in Education with a specialization in Multicultural Ed, married her now-husband, Steven Tounsand, and moved to Austin, Texas, where she began teaching in the Austin Independent School district. Gigi now teaches kindergarten and works as a librarian at All Saints' Episcopal Day School in Austin. She and Steven have a 5-year-old daughter, Hazel, and are expecting their second child in April.

**Sue Langlands, MFPM teacher:** Sue lives in Pacifica with her husband, Dan, and their children, Victoria, Iain, Patrick and Nicholas (twins). She works at her son's co-op preschool, working for the San Mateo's parks and recreation department, and volunteering as a PTO board member for her oldest son's school. She is also on the board of a local theater group.

**Zoe Peetom-Harrington, floating teacher and YMWF/YTTH teacher:** Zoe taught at the Little School for 10 years and now lives in La Honda, California, with her husband, Michael; a horse, Sam; dogs, Tugg and Sid; a tortoise called Titus, and a giant fish, Oscar. Zoe received her degree psychology from San Jose State University and is completing her masters degree in special education at Notre Dam de Namur University. Zoe is also a behavior consul-

tant and social facilitator working with families affected by autism.

## ALUMNI

**Eva Treadway:** Eva, the daughter of Little School teachers Tim and Lisa, has been getting a lot of attention for her all-girl band, the SHE'S (Sami, Hannah, Eva and Sinclair). The girls have won Battle of the Bands in Marin, performed at Bay to Breakers, and will soon be the first teen band to perform at The Independent for The Nat Keefe Concert Carnival.

**Arlo Wanerman,** teacher Todd's son, has also been making his mark on the music scene. Arlo took first place in the SFUSD Ewald Music Competition in fifth grade and won a clarinet. He participates in the Presidio Middle School Band, the Presidio Jazz Band and the California Youth Symphony. He has participated in the American Instructors of Music Solo Ensemble Festival for the past three years, earning "superior" and "superior command performance" ratings. Arlo has his own band, The Psychotherapists, which has been recording and gigging around town.

**Lauren and Audrey Hirsch:** Lauren, a senior at International High School, is bilingual in French and English and is sitting for the International Baccalaureate this May. She is interested in international relations and is applying to colleges, mostly on the East Coast. Lauren's sister, Audrey, is now in the third grade at the French-American International School. She loves to sing, play soccer and piano, and learn French from the farmers and old ladies she met in France.

**Evan and Grace Farese:** Evan and Gracie are freshmen at Thacher School in Ojai, California, along with their Little School buddy Jacqueline King. They ride horses every day, and are learning how to juggle doing laundry, mucking stalls and finishing their homework.

**Aliya Weiss:** One of Todd's former students, Aliya just celebrated her 19th birthday. After Little School she attended the Nueva School and then Cate School, and is now a sophomore at Colby College.

**Kim (Kimby) Hagner:** Kim, a student from the very first Little School class, is 27



*Eva Treadway's Band, The SHE'S*



*Arlo Wanerman's Band, The Psychotherapists*



*Evan and Grace Farese*

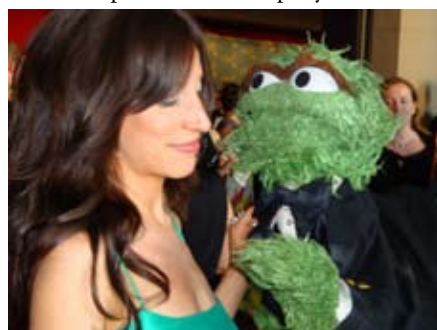


*Above: Kim Hagner  
Right: Aliya Weiss*

now and currently in Shenyang, China, on a fellowship teaching English at Northeastern University with Princeton-in-Asia.

—Jetta Jacobson

*Send your news to Alumni Newsletter, 1520 Lyon Street, San Francisco, CA 94115.*



# Labor of Love

*Three Little School veterans publish their first book on inclusion.*

Anyone who's lucky enough to have been a part of our community knows that Little School's inclusive, relationship-based approach to early-childhood education is what makes it so special. It's what makes the kids, parents and teachers who work and learn here so happy and self-confident. And it's clearly the key to supporting a diverse range of families and children, and building strong relationships among them, their teachers and school administrators.

Eager to share their decades of experience teaching preschoolers, Little School Director and Co-founder Leslie Roffman and veteran teacher Todd Wanerman, along with Program Director Cassie Briton, penned *Including One, Including All: A Guide to Relationship-Based Early Childhood Inclusion*. The book, which hits stores this month, examines the concept of inclusion that has become the backbone of Little School's tried-and-true philosophy.

"For us, inclusion is a method of supporting all children, not just those with perplexing challenges or assessed special needs," write the authors. "It is also a means of creating an inclusive classroom and school community...For us, the part of the inclusion philosophy that sees all children united by their unique strengths and challenges is the heart of the matter—and the mission of our book."

Roffman, Wanerman and Briton offer teachers and caregivers pages of tips on how to build effective relationships with kids and their families, and they guide readers through the essential process of discovering each child's unique strengths and challenges. They also focus on the task of creating a school environment in which all children feel known and supported.

This is not the first book on classroom inclusion, but *Including One, Including All* stands apart from other titles in this genre by offering practical therapeutic techniques that early-childhood experts can use on the job. "We share details and tools that we feel are central to successfully supporting children with different kinds of challenges," the authors write. "We know from our work that specific tools and skills are at the top layer of a successful approach... The idea that you must start by building a

solid foundation and then go on to more sophisticated challenges is a key theme."

The book explains how understanding a child's unique sensory profile—the way she takes in sensations and responds with plan and action—is crucial, and shows teachers how to formulate an "engage-reflect plan" to support each student. It also inspires teachers to create a "mutually supportive" classroom that encourages children to become invested in each other's growth and learning, and explains how ongoing teacher support and training, plus the collaboration among teachers, parents and administrators, help to establish an inclusive community.

Roffman says writing the book let her reflect on the rewarding work she's done—and the learning she and her team have accomplished—during the past 25 years, and to understand that these achievements represented something bigger than just one school. "The book was an opportunity that came at just the right time for me. It [enabled me] to step back from Little School and appreciate the depth, wisdom and humanity of the approach we had developed. I truly believe the book could positively impact educators, teacher trainers, administrators and policy makers—as long as we can get it in their hands."

Writing the book reaped another unexpected reward. "Through the process of explaining our approach to others, Todd, Cassie and I all learned more about what we actually do at Little School—and what we would like to do. The book has already served as a catalyst for us to re-examine and recast some of our practices."

Wanerman says he is excited that the book fills a void in the educational market. "It became clear to us...that teachers are hungry for simple, down-to-earth strategies," he explains. "We were beginning to realize that we could offer a bridge between two surprisingly separate worlds—play-based, early-childhood education and early-childhood special education. It was an amazing coincidence that [publisher] Redleaf Press was looking for people who occupied that exact niche."

"As we wrote the book," Wanerman continued, "we wondered if we really had the expertise to tell others about working



## Book Launch Party!

Little School will celebrate the publication of Cassie, Todd and Leslie's book on February 11.



with children with special needs. But the deeper we got into it and the more we shared key concepts, the more we realized that our perspective as classroom teachers who had figured out an approach from the trenches was our unique expertise."

Apparently the book already has a fan club. Its back cover boasts a stellar review by world-renowned pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton. "This is a wonderful book—for teachers and for parents," writes the founder of Brazelton Touchpoints Center in Boston. "It will help them understand the child they are working with, and help them to work together to help that child."

—Maryann LoRusso

# The Future Looks Brighter Than Ever



As president of our Board of Trustees, I am charged with managing a dedicated group of trustees who are holding the school, its mission and its future "in trust." This notion implies a different role than directing the school's operations, which is the executive director's job. Little School's trustees should be thinking of creating the school from which the children of alumni will benefit tomorrow. This is both a daunting and invigorating task.

When I look back over our past year, it was a tremendously busy time for the trustees and the Little School staff, with major construction, a successful effort to

close out an ambitious capital campaign, staffing team changes and 25th anniversary plans. Things went smoothly considering the growing maturity and complexity of our organization, now midway through its third decade. This is due in large part to the efforts made by previous boards, whose strategic decisions and careful stewardship of resources have put us in good stead heading into our 26th year.

And what does Little School look like as it turns 25? From the perspective of the trustees, a snapshot of our fiscal health shows a balanced operating budget, record fundraising in 2008, a fully funded endowment, a deferred maintenance account and two new fund initiatives, an Inclusion Fund to assist the school in supporting individual children and a 25th anniversary fund. We have also met many of the goals set out in our 2006-2007 Strategic Plan, including currently providing financial assistance for 18 percent of students, expanding our Extended Day program to better serve working families, maintaining a low staff-turnover rate, and maximizing

use of our site by renovating the yard.

While we pause to celebrate these accomplishments, the trustees are also being realistic about the challenges ahead. We are focused on the expensive and difficult tasks of managing our technology needs, maintaining our facility, and supporting our staff through innovative and competitive compensation and benefits, including retirement contributions for senior staff. Quite a tall order, but with the active participation of trustees and parents we will undoubtedly come up with a thoughtful plan and the resources to meet these challenges. I am confident that our children's children will have a strong Little School to call their own.

I encourage you to continue participating in the community at whatever level feels comfortable, in terms of your time and other resources. For lack of a more poetic way of putting it, Little School is a great and supportive organization, and we should all be proud to be a part of its past, present and future.

Susan Tunnell  
*President, Board of Trustees*

# A Groundbreaking Year for Little School



*The 25th Anniversary Committee, from left: Wendy Kesser Yanowitch, Jume Park, Anne Jung and Ingrid Carney.*

Good things come in threes. All at once, Little School is celebrating its 25th anniversary, our children are romping through a new playground seven years in the making, and three of our faculty are publishing a book of their groundbreaking pedagogy.

But, of course, none of this happens at once. It has taken a quarter-century of thoughtful leadership, visionary parents, and equal amounts tenacity, sweat, and sensitivity to grow this six-student program into the 100-family, nationally recognized institution we cherish.

From the beginning, Little School has put relationships at the heart of its program, and alumni are no exception. We all feel so connected and grateful to those pioneering families who recognized early on the brilliance and promise of our young faculty, and it was their vision and generosity that got us to Lyon Street. To see those families, some with kids in their 20s, at the open house in October with stories and good wishes was extraordinary.

We all feel a special connection to Little School. And for a nursery school to have achieved such devotion is remarkable, for no family is ever at a preschool for very

long. Yet every graduate feels so attached to the school where, as teacher Todd explains, they "first learned to say goodbye to their parents, learned how to trust another grown-up, learned how to tell someone what they want, and learned how to recognize what someone else wants."

It has been a delight to be a part of this celebration. Please stop by to say hello to veteran teachers and connect with current families still enrolled in the program. Take a turn at the wiggle stream, add your name and contact information to our alumni network, and enjoy this special milestone that you helped achieve. Stay in touch with us at [25years@littleschool.org](mailto:25years@littleschool.org). We look forward to seeing you at the book-launch party on February 11.

Happy Birthday, Little School!

Wendy Kesser Yanowitch  
*Chair, 25th Anniversary Committee*



Alumni News  
1520 Lyon Street  
San Francisco, CA 94115

We're now on Facebook! Visit The Little School's page on *Facebook.com*, or visit us at *littleschool.org*.



## Little School Alumni News Staff:

**Editor:** Maryann LoRusso

**Designer:** Inga Lim

**Little School Staff Consultant:** Todd Wanerman

**Writers:** Naomi Galley, Jetta Jacobson, Todd Wanerman

**Photographers:** John DeSouza, Steven Jo, Brie McFarland

**Cover Photography by** John DeSouza

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