

Bertschi news

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE BERTSCHI COMMUNITY



Emily Alsop

THINKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD

Ask Emily Alsop what she will miss most when she leaves Bertschi in June and she is quick to respond. "The people — students, faculty, parents — the whole Bertschi community," she says somewhat wistfully. After 20 years of teaching fourth and fifth grades, 12 of those partnered with Robin Cheney in the "fifth grade suite," Emily is ready to move on to her next life adventure. As she shared, "It's the right time, and 20 is a nice round number."



Emily came to Seattle from Hawaii, where she had tutored children whose families had fled Vietnam, before taking a full-time teaching job in a private elementary school in Honolulu. She still recalls her first experience at Bertschi, interviewing with Brigitte for a teaching position. "I knew it was a wonderful place from the start, and to this day I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to teach here. Working at Bertschi is inspirational — the school has a real heart and soul that's reflected in the people here every day."



Emily recounts a humorous story during her early years teaching fourth grade. Her classroom was across the hall from the kindergarten room, where to the delight of students, the teacher kept a large boa constrictor. One very blustery November day Emily's kindergarten colleague couldn't make the commute from Bainbridge Island due to

ferry delays. His students arrived, commenting loudly about the terrible stench that greeted them. They sought Emily's assistance, and upon entering the classroom, she discovered that the beloved boa had expired during the night and was now roasting under the heat lamp. On top of that, it was tour day and soon prospective families would enjoy the same malodorous experience she and the kids had. Fortunately, her colleague arrived, called Stan who stashed the reptile in the freezer in the science room, opened all the windows, and it was just another day at Bertschi.

For Emily, the visit each spring from Holocaust survivors or their family members stands out as a powerful learning experience at Bertschi. "The awareness and genuine sensitivity about cruelty and injustice that these individuals convey to the students is truly moving. This is what makes Bertschi different. We work hard to instill the values of compassion, acceptance, and respect in our students — there is an enormously successful emphasis on celebrating differences. It permeates the school. We are truly trying to live what we teach."

What does life after Bertschi hold for Emily? As one would expect given her energy and enthusiasm, a lot. "I would like to take more Italian classes. I am leaving for Italy in September — as the school year begins so will my new journey. I look forward to more travel and spending time with my mother, who at 94 offers a wonderful example of how to keep an active mind. I would like to find volunteer opportunities that keep me connected with children. My mother has always said that young people keep you young — that's certainly true for her. More yoga, more running — it's a long list!"



Finally, Emily's teaching partner and friend Robin Cheney shares, "Working alongside Emily for the last eleven years has been a cherished experience. Teaching with her has felt more like a fun excursion than a job. Put simply, Emily's gentle wisdom and enormous knowledge will be missed."

We send Emily off with love and best wishes — ciao!



A MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Brigitte Bertschi

Reading Emily's reflections as she leaves Bertschi after twenty years and Laurie's thoughts about why she has volunteered for nearly two decades, I found myself pondering a theme echoed by both women. Just what is "the Bertschi community?" More important, how do you build and sustain community within a school, particularly when diversity among its members is a fiercely held core value? How do you create what leadership expert John Gardner calls "wholeness incorporating diversity?"

I certainly am not the first to ask these questions. Distinguished academician and author Thomas Sergiovanni has spent the better part of his career in education studying the importance of community to schools and students. In his view, "Community is the tie that binds students and teachers in special ways, to something more significant than themselves: shared ideas and ideals. It lifts both teachers and students to higher levels of self-understanding, commitment, and performance, beyond the reaches of the shortcomings and difficulties they face in their everyday lives. Community can help teachers and students be transformed from a collection of 'I's' to a collective 'we', thus providing them with a unique and enduring sense of identity, belonging, and place."

So if community is the glue that brings us all together, what is the recipe? Does it somehow just happen, by virtue of the fact that we spend more than 200 days a year on the same campus? I think it must take more than simply occupying the same space and greeting one another on the breezeway each day.

I believe that to successfully develop and sustain a strong school community we must do two things. First, we need to state our mission clearly. We must have the courage to accept that we cannot be all things to all people. There will be some who choose not to be part of our community. However, those who do join ought to embrace our mission and form an unyielding foundation of shared values and beliefs.

Second, and following logically from the first, we must walk our talk. Every decision, policy, practice and activity should align with the school's mission. "Is what we're doing consistent with our values?" must be the guiding question. True community evolves when a collection of individuals share moral commitments and work toward common goals.

Sergiovanni is right — community does offer us an enduring sense of identity, belonging and place. At Bertschi, this extends beyond teachers and students. It includes parents, grandparents, alumni families and friends. It reaches neighbors, educators, green builders and non-profits in need of volunteers. Its members represent a rich array of cultures, religions, political beliefs, races and family structures. Nonetheless we are bound together by our commitment to Bertschi's mission: to educate compassionate, confident and creative learners, who value integrity, inclusiveness, respect, and a commitment to sustainable practices.

Thus, community does not just happen. It lives within people who have a commitment to the mission of the institution, who are willing to roll up their sleeves and work hard, who embrace diversity and different views, who challenge themselves to change their mindsets, and who are willing to ride the boat through the occasional storm. I see these people every day at Bertschi — they are our teachers, students, parents and alumni families. I am grateful to each and every person for their role in ensuring Bertschi is not a group of 'I's' but a strong community of 'we'.

IT'S A Small World AFTER ALL

One member of the Bertschi community is extending the school's reach well beyond 10th Avenue. In fact, this well-known traveler has made connections for Bertschi across the Atlantic. Wondering who has the time and resources to traverse the globe? It's Flat Stanley, of course!



First graders anticipate their introduction to Flat Stanley with great enthusiasm, as his reputation precedes him thanks to siblings and older schoolmates. This much-loved project has been part of the first grade curriculum for five years, and engages not only students but also parents, family relatives and friends during the course of activities. It all begins with reading the Flat Stanley book series to the students.

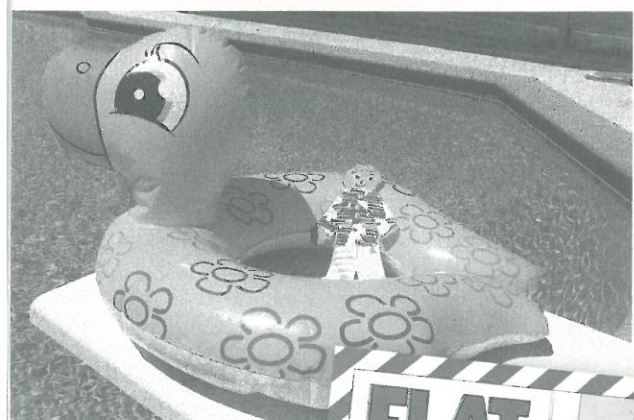
Flat Stanley and his friends have been entertaining children for more than 45 years, thanks to author Jeff Brown. Stanley Lambchop is a normal boy who finds himself flattened by a bulletin board — but that doesn't stop his adventures. He is sent through the mail to places all around the world, where friends and family take him on trips, see sights, and engage readers in learning about new places and people.

While students are learning of Flat Stanley's journeys, a committed group of parent volunteers take on the task of creating fabric replicas for every first grader — each with a unique look and personality. The children then choose their personal Flat Stanley, and that's when the fun really begins! After a week of "bonding" with their new friend, they write a letter to the host family they have selected (a relative or friends) sharing advice on how to take care of Flat Stanley, his likes and dislikes, and other pertinent information. Together the letters and the Bertschi ambassadors depart via the USPS for their first destination.

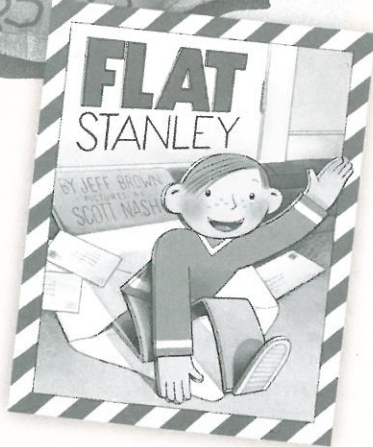
Flat Stanley's hosts send emails, letters, photos, and in some cases packages to the students, detailing their houseguest's activities, which can range from a trip to the neighborhood coffee shop to the beaches of Florida. The first-graders eagerly await the mail for word of their friends' adventures, and send a postcard midway through the unit to check on their buddies. Eventually Flat Stanley returns to Bertschi, safe and sound, full of stories to tell.

This wonderful project integrates a number of key skills and concepts including mapping, letter writing, and the distinction between city, state and country. It also ties into the students' study of extended families, including the wide variety of locations and interests among their relatives and friends.

So the next time a large envelope from Bertschi School arrives at your house, open it carefully — a new friend just might be inside!



Flat Stanley and his friends have been entertaining children for more than 45 years.





EVERY DAY IS **EARTH DAY** at Bertschi

Each year Bertschi third, fourth and fifth grade children study garbage (3rd), water (4th) and energy (5th) use at Bertschi. They recently presented their findings at the annual Earth Day All School Meeting. We are making terrific progress! Earlier in the year we were able to downsize to a smaller trash dumpster thanks to our increased recycling and composting. It is wonderful for Bertschi students to not only learn about concepts of sustainability, but truly live them by creating real change in their own community.

The All School Meeting was followed by an Earth Day Fair organized by BPC sustainability committee chairs, Jake Evans and Candice Feldman. The event was a tremendous success, attended by over 200 parents and children! Families worked on a huge student-designed environmental word search, dug in the dirt in search of worms, and ate local fruit and vegetables from Full Circle Farm. Kids and parents played a bean bag toss demonstrating how far food has traveled to reach your plate, played a recycling, trash or food waste game, examined a model-sized solar house and a robotic solar-powered dragonfly. Candice believes events like this are important "because our kids are the ones that will have to care for the earth and improve it. The earlier we can support and encourage them, the better. 'The Bertschi Way' is really evolving to include being mindful of the way we treat the earth."

WATCH OUR GARDEN **GROW!**

For years Brigitte has dreamed of having a children's vegetable and herb garden where students could dig in the dirt, learn first-hand how vegetables grow, and have an opportunity to give back to the community. Bertschi parent and Master Gardener Trish Shanley shares her vision, and spent more than a year working with Nate Cormier, a senior landscape architect at SvR Design to design this new outdoor space. Trish and a crew of volunteers that included students, parents and faculty, spent a weekend in April moving woodchips and filling planter boxes (made by Rick Stiteler, Facilities Manager) with soil.

Children in the Extended Day program will do all the planting, weeding, and watering and then sell their harvested goods to parents. Proceeds from the garden market will be donated to Northwest Harvest. Nearly every Bertschi student goes to Extended Day at least once during the year, giving all students an opportunity to cultivate the community garden, which features lavender, lettuce, parsley, red cabbage, chives, strawberries, snow peas, rosemary, and more.

You can find this bountiful addition to our campus at the west end of the playground. The location allows students to use water collected in the cisterns, which easily flows downhill. Because it is literally on the playground, students walk by their garden daily and watch it transform with the changes in season and weather. Extended Day Director Rachel Cumbow is "excited to see kids with their hands in the dirt! Because they planted the garden themselves, it is really their baby. They are invested in it and even notice the small things like a new leaf on a strawberry plant!"

We look forward to sharing our first harvest with you!



Volunteer Spotlight



Wondering how to stay connected to Bertschi after your kids leave? Ask Laurie Rosen Ritt—although her daughters graduated nearly 15 years ago, she's still here. Laurie gives new meaning to the term "volunteer"; she spends 20-25 hours a week assisting Maria (previously Andrea, and prior to her, Tom) in the art classroom. Sometimes she even works—oops, volunteers—on the weekends.

"Quality teaching is pervasive at Bertschi.

My daughters had many of the teachers that are still here.

When they come to town, they will stop at Bertschi to visit them.

One daughter wrote a paper in college about the positive effect that a particular Bertschi teacher had on her lifelong learning. That really says something."

Why? Her daughters, Jessica and Hanna, have left the nest for New York City (read more about them in Alumni Notes); yet she chooses to spend a significant amount of her free time at Bertschi surrounded by kids, paint, clay and assorted messy art materials.

"Teaching is a passion of mine," says Laurie with a sparkle in her eye. "I love the 'aha' moments with kids. I love to see the light in their face, when they acquire new artistic skills. And watching them grow over the years — in size, in confidence and in their passion — is truly a joy."

Laurie is no stranger to teaching. She has a masters degree in special education, which offers a unique perspective for her at Bertschi. "Every kid is special in his or her own way and learns differently. It takes a range of techniques and approaches to successfully reach every student." How did her interest in art begin? "I took art classes along with my kids, and then enrolled in some courses at Pratt Art Institute. I discovered a skill I didn't know I had until I volunteered 20 years ago at Bertschi for class auction art projects. I have been painting and doing art projects with kids ever since. Many other schools have called me over the years to assist with their auction art projects as well."

For Laurie, there are so many memorable moments in her days at Bertschi — but one that recurs with regularity is a child blurting out, "I love art" while totally engrossed in a project. She shares, "Their teacher, Maria Grade is not only a gifted artist, but she is remarkable at classroom management. Mixing kids with art supplies is a daunting challenge and I have learned innumerable techniques that contribute to a classroom of focus and creativity. It is a privilege to work with her."

What makes the Bertschi community so special? In Laurie's view, it's because people listen. "At Bertschi, whether it's parents, students or faculty, you feel acknowledged, heard and appreciated. The school offers a safe and nurturing environment without being cloying."

Any final thoughts? "I wouldn't do this if I didn't love it. Bertschi gave me a gift by providing an exceptional education for my daughters. It's my turn to give back."

ALUM UPDATES

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Send your updates to tiffanyc@bertschi.org



LENA PANESCU-REICH '08 is in 7th grade at Northwest School and spent a full week volunteering in Jill's first grade class this April during the second week of her spring break. Lena keeps very busy playing ultimate frisbee and soccer, riding horses, and playing the alto saxophone, but she wanted to return to Bertschi because "Jill is a really good teacher and she made my

first grade year really special, so I think it is important to give back to her." Lena "really liked working with the little kids that attacked me with love! It was also really fun to be able to eat lunch in the teachers lounge." Jill shared that "Lena was like a big sister to my students and they all adored her! My favorite part of the experience was to see how Lena has blossomed into such a confident, sweet young woman since she was a first grader in my class." It was a joy to have Lena back on campus.

JULIA DRACHMAN '03 will attend Wesleyan University in Connecticut in the fall 2010.



JARED YOUMANS '09 is in 6th grade at Lakeside School and came in 4th place in the national poetry contest, *River of Words*. He was honored in Olympia and his poem was displayed in the lobby of the Department of Ecology.



HANNAH FULLER '06 is a freshman at Roosevelt High School and very involved in both ballet and modern dance. This winter, she and a friend started a guild whose goal is to raise money for uncompensated care at Seattle Children's Hospital. Hannah has "already started fundraising and recently organized a garage sale that raised \$630.

We are calling our guild Wishing Well and our group is steadily growing in numbers. What started as a simple project has grown into a fun, heartwarming activity that I am enjoying greatly."



ROYA HAROUN '03 is a senior at University Prep and will attend Rhode Island School of Design in the fall. Art is Roya's passion and she is a wonderful illustrator, contributing to many editions of the school newspaper. Roya spends her summers in Syria

where she works at a school for disabled children. Despite some of the language and cultural differences, Roya is very successful

at captivating her audience of children. She is very much looking forward to her new college experience in the fall. In April, Roya visited Bertschi to celebrate Earth Day with us! (Roya, with her parents and her brother Rashid, a kindergartner at Bertschi.)

AZMI HAROUN

'05 is a junior at Seattle Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is busy with very demanding honors English and History classes while also playing varsity soccer and performing with the school band. Last summer, Azmi spent a month in Zambia with SAAS. Azmi has corresponded with a child in Zambia since eighth grade, so this was an exciting opportunity for him and he returned to the U.S. very appreciative of all that he has. Azmi has visited some colleges already and will start the college application process this fall.

CAROLINE RICHARDSON WEINER '91 recently moved back to Seattle with her husband, Josh, and lives in Ballard just seven blocks from her sister, **Abby Richardson Maletis '93** and her husband, Bryan. Caroline and Josh lived in Asia for three years and started her jewelry business, Bacca, while living in Shanghai, China. She now spends half her time on her business, and the other working for a fitness studio called Barre3 (a yoga, pilates, ballet fusion class). Caroline and Abby's parents, Ellen and Mark Richardson, live in Portland, OR, but visit their daughters in Seattle often.



JESSICA RITT '95 and sister **HANNA '97** are living in New York City. After graduating from University Prep, both attended Emory University in Atlanta before heading to the Big Apple. Jessica works at Keri Leavitt Communications, doing

public relations for the firm's lifestyle companies. Hanna is a recruiter for Bloomberg, the internationally known financial information network.

Circle of Chores

Leaves fall...

I rake 'em.

They decompose...

Dad takes 'em.

Puts it on seedlings...

Mom tends to 'em.

Seedling grows into a tree.

Leaves fall...

I rake 'em.

JARED YOUMANS



A REAL "Who's Who" IN 3RD GRADE

If you happened to walk into a third grade classroom in late March, you may have caught a glimpse of Harry Houdini, Sacajawea, Gandhi or Barack Obama. These are just a few of the historic figures Bertschi third graders chose to profile in their Wax Museum, the finale to their month long biography book project.

The first step was for students to read a biography or autobiography of a person about whom they knew very little and wanted to learn more. After completing the book, they wrote a short essay, sharing their opinion of the individual and the lessons they could learn from his or her life.



Next came their "A Day in the Life of..." narrative. Students creatively wove in specific details about their character, using information relevant to the time period and life experiences of that person. For example, Ichiro Suzuki's narrative might begin with "My alarm woke me from a deep sleep — do I really have to head to Safeco and hit 100 baseballs?"

In preparation for the opening of the Wax Museum, children created a tri-fold visual display that presented pictures, artwork, historic information and fun facts or trivia. With their exhibits complete, there was only one thing left — installation of the wax figurine representing the individual they now know so well.



Drum roll, please, as the doors to the museum open. Parents, students, siblings and friends oohed and aahed as they entered the third grade classrooms, which were transformed into a museum that rivaled Madame Tussauds. Visitors were instructed to press the button on each display, which prompted the figure to share their identity

and interesting facts about their life and accomplishments. There was something for everyone — whether your interest was sports, politics, history, or even fantasy, a figure would come alive and speak to you. It was difficult to tell who had more fun — the museum patrons or the students. Perhaps a sequel to "Night at the Museum" is in the making!

**MANY
THANKS!**

Each fall we ask parents, grandparents, alumni families and friends to support Bertschi's extraordinary program through a gift to the Annual Fund. This year, thanks to many generous gifts, we pushed past our goal of \$300,00! This includes 41 donors contributing at the Leadership level of \$2,500 or more, and 10 families making gifts of \$500 or more to our new Alumni Family Giving Circle. Thank you for your wonderful commitment to Bertschi and our students — we are grateful for your continued confidence in our work and belief in our mission.



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SUMMER 2010

Bertschi

Got Green? We Do!

For the past two years, students from the Seattle Girls' School come to Bertschi to see green design principles in action, particularly in a school context. SGS faculty member Wendy Ewbank shared the following report of their recent visit to our campus.

In early March we launched an engineering/architecture project that requires the 7th grade students to design a future SGS campus that follows green principles. The students become specialists in such areas as building design, energy and transportation, gardens and landscaping, and waste and water. Among our guest speakers were Kate Spitzer and Stacey Smedley, who have worked on Bertschi's green design and are engaged in planning the new "living classroom."

Stan Richardson and Brigitte Bertschi shared a slide presentation that gave an overview of major design elements and how different grade levels integrate these in their learning. Among the features we saw on a walking tour were rain storage cisterns and toilets with high and low flushes (thus reinforcing the concept of gray water usage), various types of insulation (like denim), solar panels, skylights, an underground parking garage with plug-ins for hybrid cars, and a gymnasium with bamboo wood floors. The girls could clearly see that sustainable design features — which reduce our environmental footprint — can exist in a beautiful setting.

I live on Capitol Hill and have long heard of Bertschi, as well as knowing students who attended elementary school there. In addition, I attended the PNAIS workshop on sustainability that Bertschi hosted last spring. I am especially impressed with the way the school design is itself an intentional teaching tool (i.e. through panels on the walls that highlight materials and energy usage). I have no doubt the girls will incorporate many of the features they learned about in their original designs for a "Future SGS." Their plans will be shared not just with panels of community experts (including our own Stan Richardson), but with SGS board members, in hopes that they take students' suggestions seriously and integrate their ideas in planning a more permanent and sustainable campus.

Thanks so much for sharing your work with us!

