

My Old Hippie School

By Dana Utroske – First Graduating Class: 1996

No one could build fairy houses like my second grade teacher. She always created fantastic feats of architecture while we stood in silent awe. Besides fairy house construction, we learned about Norse Mythology, organic farming, Native American culture, music, art, and the Spanish colonization of southern North America. My school took a holistic approach to education. This approach was called the Novato Charter School, which I fondly call “My Old Hippie School.”

Mrs. Holt was my teacher from first to fourth grade. She nurtured her students, identifying us as seeds in need of a little soil and a lot of water and love, which she provided amply. I adored her.

Mrs. Holt taught us our math symbols through elaborate stories involving gnomes--like the thin subtraction gnome who wore blue and a mournful expression since he always lost his gems through a hole in his pocket--and our letters were introduced after intricate stories involving princes and dragons, like the Proud Prince whose chest puffed out to represent a P. Our class sang to creeks, danced around a May Pole, measured the length of Noah’s Ark in cubits, and sojourned to farms, gold-mining camps, and aquariums for our week-long field trips. We learned to play a new instrument every year. We memorized thirteen-stanza poems which we would recite at concerts with sign language.

In the summer after fourth grade, my family moved to Hood River, Oregon, where I attended “regular” school for the first time. There were lists of rules, classes were structured,

and my parents were mailed my report card every nine weeks. Art was replaced by science, music by PE, and Norse mythology by the American Revolution. My new classmates dated, broke up, and reconciled; tossed curses and rumors around without thought; and, most shockingly, seemed entirely uninterested in their education and school.

And while I've adjusted, I've kept the Waldorf spirit with me. Mrs. Holt instilled in me the values that still govern my life. I was taught to appreciate other people, nature, and equality; beauty, creativity, and curiosity--values that I find are not well-emphasized in other schools. I feel I know myself better, and am much more prepared for the "real world" than my classmates, and I believe that is rooted in my Waldorf education.

Nurtured and encouraged by My Old Hippie School, my innate interest in music grew to my current love of it. I've dedicated a considerable portion of my life to the study and appreciation of music through participating in musicals, out of school choirs, private lessons, and current four music classes at high school.

I also hope my love of writing, which was always supported by Mrs. Holt and my classmates when I brought stories I had written to Show & Tell, will someday become more than just a hobby.

My Old Hippie School taught me to grow kale and to knit, but also to view the world differently. Mrs. Holt gave me a unique perspective on life and an education only she could provide. I've grown to be well-rounded, creative, and curious.