

My family has been involved in the Novato Charter School since the year before it opened - about 14 years. We are in the last year of our direct involvement - our youngest daughter, Sofia, will graduate in June. This has given me reason to reflect on what an amazing journey it has been, from first hearing of a project to start a Waldorf based charter school while sitting in a hot tub at the health club, through the inevitable ups and downs inherent to such a daunting project, to where we are now, a shining example of what a charter school can offer. It has been a tremendous amount of work, but it was truly a labor of love, the best kind of work. In fact, that may be one of the secrets to our success; a charter school can only survive and thrive if its members, teachers and administrators dedicate heart and soul to their vision. In so doing, we have built not just a school but a community, as much a home for our parents as for our children.

One time my daughter, Juliana (who was in the first class to go from kindergarten to 8th grade), found me feeling a bit down and just came and started talking to me, in a way I might have talked her through something as her father. It was a fascinating role reversal, one of those glimpses we get of how children can be wise beyond their years. She said something that seemed so simple and so true that it moves me to this day - she said, "Sometimes I see things, feelings as a shape... For example, when I think of my home, I think of a circle. Dad, I am so glad I went to the charter school - it feels like a circle to me..." Now that she is in college, I see that she still feels part of that circle, even as it ripples out to include a larger and larger world.

We have all heard of the stages of change in a child's life but lately I find myself thinking of the stages of a parent's life in a Waldorf school. I have thought a lot about our 9 year change as we pass through it for the second and last time with our daughter. In the early years of our involvement at NCS, much of our lives revolved around this school, our young children and the many friends we made here. We were involved in more work days and projects than I can remember, my wife Marucia was on the NCS board for four years and we worked hard to connect the school into the Hamilton community where we live. In recent years though, as one daughter went off to high school we found our attention divided and our involvement mainly limited to our other daughter's activities. We felt a little guilty but were relieved to see that a whole new wave of parents had come forth with the same kind of enthusiasm we had in the beginning.

We could be considered one of the founding families of the Novato Charter School, but I would encourage all of you, even if this is your first year, to consider yourself founding families, because to remain vital and relevant, this school needs to be in a continual state of becoming; you need to think of yourselves as building this school into the circle that your children will someday ripple out from. When we committed to this school 14 years ago, it was almost on a trial basis, we had no idea if it was right for us or if it would even survive. Well, it worked for us better than we could have imagined. In fact, it not only survived, it thrived, so much so that it is all too easy to be lulled into complacency, although one look at our current and projected budget crisis will disabuse us of that notion quickly. So for those of you who are relatively new to this school, this is when you get to step to the plate and help us through this new challenge. For those of you whose children are moving on, I encourage you to remember the contribution this school made to who they are and who they will become and to find ways to continue to support the Novato Charter School after you leave so that others will have the same chance you had.

James Schwartz
Father

Juliana Schwartz Class of 2005
Sofia Schwartz Class of 2010

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Schwartz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.