

The Curriculum

MARIN MONTESSORI SCHOOL



“We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.” WINSTON CHURCHILL



Contributors to *The Current* • Zarrín Atkins • Brie Burkett • Caitlin Crain • Aidan Demian • Claire Donnelley • Mia Eisenberg • Jeff Gossett • Emerson Harris • Hannah Jagoda • Jules Layman • Minnie McBride • Christina McWhorter • Anna Yarbrough

Recently, a friend of mine identified stewardship as “leaving something better than you found it.” Though simplistic perhaps, his description belies complex roots. The articles in this issue of *The Current* reflect both those roots and their many-faceted fruits. From their early engagement in practical life children learn to care for their world: the classroom, the porch, the garden. As they grow older their world widens—from their home to their community, from their country to the planet. Their sense of stewardship grows from the practical to the abstract in ever widening circles. One of the great strengths of Montessori education is its support of this process. From the care and feeding of an animal in the classroom to the exploration of the plight of honeybees, Montessori students are encouraged to explore, to learn, and to find ways to make a difference.

Though “stewardship” is classified as an abstract noun, its core meaning is grounded in action. We achieve stewardship when we perform an action that reflects caring and commitment to something or someone in the world around us. It may be as simple as caring for helpful bugs in a garden, as important as creating an effective garbage process in a school community, as complex and arduous as restoring coastal wetlands to their pristine condition. They are all actions that provide meaning to the heart of stewardship.

Though many of these articles reflect stewardship of the natural world, an equal number reflect stewardship of the human community. These activities make real the human connections that underlie our varied circumstances. Our labors alongside the communities we serve broaden and enrich our individual and collective humanity. We end up as the benefactors of our own actions; as Booker T. Washington affirmed, “If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.”

Acts of stewardship help each of us to belong to something greater than ourselves, to be a part of a community of shared vision and valued accomplishment. Ultimately, stewardship leads us to better understanding and caring for ourselves. Through the compassion, responsibility, and commitment we develop through stewardship, we create and then strengthen the structure of our own character. There is no question that when we give we receive a multitude of rewards.

The pieces in this edition of *The Current* will make you feel good as you reflect on the experiences of your teachers, children, and friends. Most important, they will encourage you and reinforce your own desire to make a difference and to find your own path in stewardship.

Enjoy engaging.

[JIM MUNGER
HEAD OF SCHOOL

Taking Good Care



In Toddler and Primary Classrooms

When I think about stewardship for the children in the first plane of development, practical life comes to mind, where the focus is on taking care of the person and taking care of the environment.

Merriam Webster defines stewardship as *the activity or job of protecting and being responsible for something*. In our Toddler and Primary classrooms there are many activities that offer opportunities to do exactly that. On a recent visit to the Sandpiper community, within ten minutes I saw several examples of children taking care of their classroom environment. One toddler very excitedly asked Miss Lynn if she could feed the fish. She carefully held the small ceramic dish while Miss Lynn put in a small amount of food. She then carried it slowly and purposefully over to the tank and tipped the flakes into the water. As is often the case in a toddler class, excitement is contagious, so another child then went to ask if he, too, could feed the fish. Miss Lynn explained that they had already been fed today and there would be another opportunity tomorrow, an important lesson learned at an early age. I observed a young boy repeatedly washing the sliding glass door with great concentration. This activity has been carefully prepared by the guide with child-sized materials to allow for success and requires many steps that are shown to the child in an individual lesson. Another child watered a plant, while another prepared a beautiful flower arrangement to decorate the table. As these are two-year-olds, there are occasional spills, providing yet another opportunity to be responsible without negative consequences, just an added step: "I see there is water on the floor. Let's get a cloth and clean it up, so no one slips."

The outdoor environment in the toddler community is full of activities for little hands to engage in the natural world. The apple tree is the perfect height for a child to pick a delicious apple of his choosing, wash it, then sit right down and take a bite or two. Helping Miss Lynn plant strawberries and flowers and watching the insects and birds holds great interest for young children. There is nothing more satisfying to a toddler than watering plants. Over and over, they fill their watering cans and find plants that need water, until the container is empty. Tomorrow, they will happily begin again.

In our Primary classes, the three- to six-year-olds continue the work they began as toddlers. Practical life activities become more complex and require longer periods of concentration, but result in the same profound joy at realizing the work is meaningful and important. The children in Primary have indoor/outdoor environments and can move freely between the two. Each classroom has its own pet—in one a snake, in another a gecko—and the children are responsible for its care.

I recently had the privilege of chaperoning a field trip to Bon Tempe Lake to release baby rainbow trout, called fry, which had been raised from eggs in the Quail classroom. I was very impressed with how knowledgeable the children were and how carefully they released the tiny fish into the lake, following the instructions they had been given by the ranger. Our Primary children at Marin Montessori are very fortunate to have a beautiful Children's Garden that they can choose to go to on any given day, if the necklace is available. There Miss Brie, who has a wealth of knowledge and passion for all things related to the garden, engages the children in hours of wonder and discovery. She has shared more about many of the wonderful activities that go on in the garden in an article elsewhere in this issue of *The Current*.

Children in our Primary classrooms are encouraged to be good stewards of the earth. If you have had the opportunity to receive a lunch invitation, always

a special treat for me, you will have noticed how calm and peaceful the experience of eating good, nutritious food can be, even with twenty-four 3- to 6-year-olds! After lunch, the children put scraps of food into the compost and work together to clean up the environment. It is the responsibility of one child to take the paper recycling to the communal bin. These children are developing good habits that will continue to be nurtured when they move into the Elementary and Junior High programs.

JULES LAYMAN
MMS LOWER SCHOOL DIRECTOR

At the Elementary Level

It's early morning. The tide is low, the fog has lifted, and the first item in my planner reads: *Meet with Hannah, 9:00 a.m., to discuss Walk-A-Thon/Obstacle Course details*. A Google Calendar alert pops up on my phone reminding me of that meeting in half an hour, just in case. Then, at 9:00 a.m. sharp, my desk phone rings. It's Hannah. Hannah is one of many Elementary students at MMS who brings to life the idea of stewardship. Her ownership of creating an event to support a real need—in this case, raising money for a local branch of the ASPCA—is a perfect example of caring and sharing at its best.

Stewardship takes on an active role in the second plane Elementary child. Development

3

“Children have an anxious concern for living beings and the satisfaction of this instinct fills them with delight. It is therefore easy to interest them in taking care of plants and especially of animals.”

MARIA MONTESSORI, *THE DISCOVERY OF THE CHILD*

of responsibility is a characteristic acquired and reinforced throughout the elementary years. Providing a child with a sense of ownership over his work, whether collaborative or individual, is imperative to the development of the whole self. Maria Montessori strategically and effectively developed Cosmic Education to create an educational template that would engage Elementary children in a universal experience. The Elementary child is waking up to a world beyond the walls of home and school. He is becoming himself, and others exist and flourish in this new world of his. Elementary children ask questions that lead them toward careful navigation of the outside world. At the Primary level, “help me take care of myself” is a driving theme; in Elementary classrooms that evolves into “How can I take care of myself, my community, and beyond?” More practically put, it becomes “How do I raise money to help save the rainforest as well as the pandas?”

Montessori classrooms provide students with opportunities to care for their immediate environment. The time it takes them to clean a fish tank, change the bedding in the bunny pen, study a developing country, or research an animal on the brink of extinction is time in which their wheels are constantly churning as they begin to understand how they are a part of something bigger than themselves. In this sense, Elementary students are preparing to be stewards of the world.

ZARRÍN ATKINS
ELEMENTARY LEVEL DIRECTOR

In the Adolescent Environment

Stewardship for the adolescent spans both the micro and macro levels. One of the foundational and essential elements of adolescent education is the development of the individual in society. As an individual in society, a person must be responsible for the society in which they are a part, while understanding how to contribute to and care for that society. Young adolescents are at the beginning of this journey and are exploring their place and their purpose within society. Additionally, adolescence is a sensitive period for justice and dignity, giving us the opportunity to improve the individual during this sensitive time in order to improve society. Stewardship, whether in the classroom or the local wetlands, provides adolescents with an opportunity to take responsibility, feel a deep sense of purpose, explore and experience justice and injustice, as well as dignity and lack thereof. These experiences, both small and large, aid the adolescent on her road to adulthood, the developmental path to becoming a contributing member of society.

Within the MMS Junior High environment and community, stewardship is woven into the very fabric of daily life. Every day, adolescents partake in chores, both in the schoolhouse and on the farm, that help support and maintain the prepared environment. Adults and students work side-by-side caring for the indoor and outdoor environment and the animals, learning valuable practical life skills,

“The awareness of one’s own usefulness, the feeling that one can help humanity in various ways, fills the heart with a noble confidence, with an almost religious dignity.”

MARIA MONTESSORI

contributing to the community, feeling a sense of purpose and responsibility in their work, and being appreciated by others for their efforts. Rotating through work and classes that are connected to the needs of the farm, students develop a deep connection to and appreciation for the land, and come to understand, through experience, the needs of the farm, and the responsibility that we have as stewards of the farm. Stewardship in our community is also characterized by responsibility for the care of other individuals and the community as a whole. We meet weekly in a community council to appreciate and honor the contributions of others, and to raise issues and work together to solve them. Through this experience, and other intentional community reflections, students realize how they are appreciated for their contributions, develop a deeper sense of empathy, and recognize the need to care for and support others.

Adolescents are beginning to look outward and contemplate their own place and role in society. In preparation for adult life, we want them to develop a sense of responsibility, of stewardship, for the planet and humanity, therefore we offer our students numerous experiences to explore and contribute beyond the walls of the schoolhouse and the fences of the farm. In science classes, students investigate the influence that mankind has had on the land and reflect on our responsibility for healing it. This year, they are doing this work through projects that focus on habitat restoration, the impact of shark finning on the decimated shark population, and a study of bees (and their declining numbers). Other examples include projects such as buildings and structures that examine the impact our buildings have on global warming, and a student-run project to make our school a “zero waste” community, to name a few. These projects are characterized by experiential learning, with students actively participating in defining and solving these problems. Stewardship is not limited to the natural environment but also to care for humanity. Every Friday, students participate in community work by volunteering at a variety of organizations, including animal shelters, homes for the elderly, and Primary classrooms.

One of our greatest hopes for this educational model is that an outcome of this work will result in the formation of adults who focus on stewardship and care, and become citizens who celebrate their lives with genuine and generous spirit of service.

ANNA YARBROUGH
MMS JUNIOR HIGH DIRECTOR

Adventures in San Pancho

This story started three and a half years ago. When I turned ten, instead of having a birthday party, I went to a small fishing village, San Pancho, Mexico, where I volunteered at a community center, and I gave my birthday money to a girl who couldn't afford to go to school.

In Mexico, public schools aren't free like they are in the United States. Every year each student has to pay \$600 to go to a government-run school that gives teachers a salary and a classroom and nothing more. When school supplies are needed the teachers often have to pay out of pocket, and, in addition, a lot of students need tutoring. About ten years ago, a young woman, Nicole, had a vision and the desire to help overcome some of the challenges of this small town in Northern Mexico.

The idea behind Nicole's vision was that everyone in the community would teach someone else their special skill, and everyone would learn something. The domino effect would take it even further. EntreAmigos was born. This organization and community center encompassed this idea of shared learning and many more. Another of these ideas was a financial scholarship program for students doing a good job in school.

Jimena, the girl I have been sponsoring for the past three and a half years, is the type of child who could go to any school and be exceptional. This past year she had the highest GPA and an amazing love of learning that isn't taught. She dreams of going to college and becoming an architect once she graduates from high school. When I met with Jimena for my MMS Personal Odyssey documentary, I asked her what she thought of the community of EntreAmigos and she shared that she loved learning, going on field trips, doing arts and crafts, and getting to know her community members. Jimena hopes that many people will learn about EntreAmigos, sponsor other students, and come teach and volunteer. At EntreAmigos everyone is encouraged to teach something, and everyone is entitled to learn something. The definition of EntreAmigos is “among friends.” I feel it is a perfect fit.

I posted the video I made on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6YjPGAhSci>
I hope you enjoy viewing it.

Mia Eisenberg
MMS Junior High Student



JUNK

Waste. Garbage. Trash. Rubbish. Call it what you want, but no matter the name, the junk humans create is a growing problem. My opinion and outlook on garbage is that it is a resource. Utilizing it is key, and not wasting it is even more important. People don't yet realize the impact that our waste has on both the planet and the people living on it. The truth is that humans use up precious resources and dispose of them in impractical ways. Hearing these facts from my father when he worked for an organization called Marin Conservation Corps really shocked me.

I was in sixth grade working with a few friends on a project to inform our peers about something prominent going on in the world. A couple other students and I chose to invest our last year of elementary school in learning about the world's growing garbage problem. We first went to the sanitation station where all the garbage, recycling, and compost is sorted and disposed of or reused. The amount of different types of waste we saw was incredible, from plastic bottles to mattresses, to loads of uneaten food. Our jaws dropped during the tour as we continued our odyssey. Our next trip was to the beach, where we were to collect all the trash we could find. Then weigh it. And then sort it in a way that would allow for the fewest resources to go into the landfill. We arrived at Stinson Beach and began with buckets and gloves. Yet again I was shocked. The multitude of waste included batteries, cigarettes, soda cans, and even a golf club. This was only a part of the rise of my inspiration. Next, we headed to Redwood Landfill where Marin County's garbage goes to rot. Our group was allowed to literally drive into where the trash is buried. We saw groups of birds living in these conditions, and I had trouble believing the amount of garbage I saw being stuffed into a gigantic hole. From that day on my goal became to waste nothing. Waste Zero. Zero Waste. Our county set the target year of 2025 to achieve Zero Waste. I believe our school community can do better.

A year passed by, and once at the Junior High I decided to set my plans in action. For one semester my personal odyssey was to inform the rest of the school of the garbage problem, hoping that it would help to motivate people to pay attention. Then I went to work and created a system that allowed for all natural materials to be disposed of in an organic way. For example, I added compostable paper towels to our supplies so that no more bleached white paper towels would contribute to landfill. Also, I changed the way our systems function, allowing for a less confusing waste stream and making it easier for our community to get the job done in the right way. At this point, it's the non-compostable, non-natural products that make up our trash. The goal has always been Waste Zero, but it's a little more than just changing how people throw away trash. I despise the words garbage, trash, rubbish, and waste, yet I believe if I can change the way people see a plastic bag or bottle or cup, or even the way they talk about garbage, I can change more than the way our school community uses resources—I can change garbage as we know it.

AIDAN DEMIAN
MMS JUNIOR HIGH STUDENT

7



Feeling Good
Doing Good

“Service is our rent for living.”

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

That was the quote that started my college essays. It was followed by describing the true value and meaning I had found through community service in my teen years – on Conservation Corps building trails in National Parks, teaching ESL at a bilingual education center, during holiday food drives with my grandma. My commitment to service continued after college as an AmeriCorps Volunteer Leader researching water quality in southern Maine and throughout my career as a coastal ecologist. But somehow, as a parent, service had fallen off my larger-than-ever “to-do” list. Between snacks, school, and endless household chores of the early childhood years I hadn’t been scheduling time to participate in and expose my children to something so dear to my heart. Fortunately, MMS’s Good Works efforts have been the perfect (re)introduction to service for me and my family.

The first event we participated in as a family was Coastal Cleanup. We helped organize the MMS group cleaning up a Mill Valley bike path through a coastal wetland, and my kids LOVED it. Not only did they get to muck-around in the marsh, they did it with friends and families they knew (or got to know!) from school. My son looked up to the big boys who found 5 soccer balls in the marsh and creek as heroes. My daughter collected all the tiny pieces of paper and plastic snack bags scattered from the nearby parking lot. I was able to leave her with one of those “big boys” (a responsible, sweet MMS preteen) while I continued handing out bags and gloves to arriving families. At the end of the day we had fun figuring out the most unusual piece of trash we found (a large garden rake) and delivering our stack of papers to the Bay Model Visitor’s Center. My kids loved the idea that we were part of an international effort cleaning up coastlines simultaneously across the country and even the world. They told grandparents on the Atlantic shore to look out for coastal cleanup volunteers. They

asked for weeks about why so many people threw cigarette butts into the Bay or what happened to wildlife when they ate plastic.

What we experienced through the Coastal Cleanup is available through all of the Good Works opportunities at MMS – learning through service, instilling important values, and building community within our school.

Learning by doing is an essential cornerstone of Montessori education. Participating in a Good Works event opens a world of educational opportunities for children. This might come in the form of a formal lesson from experts at Marin County Open Space during the Ring Mountain Cleanup, or in more subtle ways as a child’s curiosity leads to questions and discussions after collecting trash from a waterway or when picking a book to donate to someone less fortunate. Service learning helps the greater community while providing lessons that actually stay with children – your children; they don’t just receive information, they gain a whole experience.

In addition, MMS service days are one of the best opportunities for community building at our school. Families from across school levels come out for a few hours with a common purpose. They work side-by-side chatting about mundane details of pulling weeds or life in Marin, and the connection made is much stronger than the usual small talk.

Good Works at MMS through the Parents’ Association is only the beginning. As our children grow, these efforts come from their own passions and are pursued within their classrooms. The Good Works community events are an opportunity to lay the foundation so that our children and our school community continue to “pay our rent for living” in this amazing place we are all fortunate to call home.

CAITLIN CRAIN
MMS PARENT
PARENTS’ ASSOCIATION “GOOD WORKS” COORDINATOR



South-of-the-Border Service Adventure

A few weeks before Thanksgiving, my mother informed me that we would be going on a trip over the break. A friend had told her about a charity organization called “From Houses to Homes”, or FHTH. They operate in Guatemala, building houses for poor people in rural areas. Naturally when hearing this, I was both apprehensive and rather nervous. Guatemala City has one of the highest crime rates in Central America, and that would be our flight destination. When the day of the flight came, I had no idea what to expect. We flew from SFO to L.A. and eventually to Guatemala after a 5-hour flight from LAX. The time difference was back one hour but we left L.A. around midnight and flew overnight, so it was about 6 a.m. when we finally got there. We were all extremely jetlagged as we boarded the van that was waiting for us.

Guatemala City was like a different planet compared to other cities that I've been to. Colorful diesel buses flew past us, people darted across streets without looking, and animals ran free. Leaving the city, we drove into the countryside and eventually to the beautiful town of Antigua, which is known for the three volcanoes that surround it (and erupt randomly and harmlessly). After finding our hotel in the maze of cobbled streets, our room was unfortunately not ready so we crashed on a couch with our luggage and took a nap. The day we arrived was our official rest day, so we explored the sights and crafts of the wonderful little town. The next day was our first real workday. We left the hotel early to meet up with the family that had recommended the experience to us. We all walked to FHTH office in a different part of Antigua. After signing paperwork and introducing ourselves to other work project families and the people who run the operation, everyone hopped in the back of multiple pickup trucks and headed to the worksite. It was my first time in the back of a pickup truck for that long, and I have to say it was a fun experience. Definitely not allowed in California, but it was the norm in Guatemala.

After a fifteen-minute drive to our worksite, we were dropped off at our site along with our two foremen, Edgar and Felix, who would not only guide us in building the house but were just super cool dudes. We walked down a little alley to the house and walked in. We were greeted by a clumsy puppy the size of my shoe who was obsessed with shoelaces, and an even smaller kitten in constant threat of being accidentally stepped on or crushed on the worksite. We were then greeted by the family of six, consisting of a father and a mother (both with third grade educations), a daughter in sixth grade, two grade school boys, and a six-month-old baby. They lived in a dilapidated cornstalk and corrugated metal house with dirt floors and no door. After we were introduced to the family (and I tried out my lovely Spanish skills), we got right to work. The foremen, Edgar and Felix, told us to grab some shovels and get 19 wheelbarrows of sand, 12 wheelbarrows of gravel, bags of concrete and water to mix a cement volcano. You got it. There are no mechanized cement mixers here. At the time it seemed like a daunting task, but luckily we got a little help from our friends Chloe, Sonja, Ruggles, and Tommy. With their help we finished our task before lunch and then ate tortillas and sandwiches with our new friends. Later that afternoon, we formed an assembly line to pour the foundation before heading back to the

hotel – tired and sore, but having done as FHTH put it, “the hardest work you’ll ever love.”

As the rest of the week passed, we learned more about the family and the little rural village we were working in. After working every day, we played soccer with the village children and showed them the magical iPhone. Being around that kind of society and culture was in such strong contrast to the bubble of Marin. It was such a great learning experience for everybody. Meanwhile, the house was coming right along as we stacked more and more concrete blocks and filled all the gaps with mortar... row by row, higher and higher it grew. Most of the house was put together except for the roof and the paint, so after we poured the cement floor on Thursday, we visited the local school, Montessori-inspired, that FHTH started and watched an adorable Christmas Nativity performance. Friday arrived quickly along with the completion of the house after a few coats of paint. To say “thank you” the family made us a delicious lunch that we shared together in their new home. We then experienced what FHTH calls the “key handing-over” ceremony where even the father broke down into tears of gratitude. My brother, Lucca, had managed to raise \$250 in a bake sale before we left, enough to buy the family both a new stove and a water filtration system. They were beyond grateful.

Later that night we hung out with the foremen and bought them all drinks in appreciation of helping us through the week. I had made a connection with Edgar so I gave him the gift of my favorite sunglasses because (he thought) he looked like a cool Guatemalan Tom Cruise in them. After that, we had a day or two of shopping (my mom) and exploration, and a lot of eating, and then we headed back home. All in all, this was one of the best, most rewarding experiences I have ever had. Nothing feels better than helping people. I highly recommend this enriching, bonding, learning experience. If you are interested in knowing more about the organization that offers these unique opportunities, please check out the FHTH website at: www.fromhousestohomes.org. Adios!

EMERSON HARRIS
MMS JUNIOR HIGH STUDENT

A close-up photograph of several children's hands planting seeds into dark, rich soil. The hands are positioned at various heights, some holding seeds, others touching the earth. The background is blurred, showing more children and a bright, outdoor setting.

Ground Level

JEFF GOSSETT
MMS PARENT
CHILDREN'S GARDEN VOLUNTEER

Revelations

My experience in the MMS garden began during our first visit to the school, before we were even enrolled. My family had only been back in the U.S. for two weeks since returning from three years in Spain. It was a sunny August day and we finished the campus tour by walking through the garden. Director of Admissions Cheryl Jagoda bid us farewell and handed Gus a little bag, suggesting that he pick some fruit to take home. He harvested a handful of raspberries. He was happy. Gus's Montessori school in Madrid was very small, warm, and communal; leaving it was the toughest part of our move. For his first U.S. school experience, we had prepared ourselves for a more formal and less personal school setting. Instead, we left our first visit with ripe, just-picked fruit, two friendly faces (we also met Gus's teacher, Miss Cheryl), and a stunning view of the bay. Intrigued and inspired, I was determined to meet the gardening coordinator, Ms. Brie, in hopes of volunteering.

While in Spain, I discovered that volunteering was a way to be involved in Gus's school — and I'll admit to wanting to keep a half eye on the wobbly toddler during this first transition from home. One of the many highlights of my work there was creating a container garden on the terrace of the urban school. I am not a gardener, but I love cooking and was eager to get the kids involved in an organic school garden. I focused on planting and harvesting, which seemed a sure way to engage the children. Unfortunately, we quickly ran out of space for planting and food for harvesting; many days we puzzled over what to do with the kids. And gardening was not easy! The peas withered by some invisible force; the strawberries so promising one day, reduced to nubs by the next, the culprit long gone. We offered simple explanations, bought more seedlings, and tried again. We planted lettuces, peas, potatoes, carrots, herbs, artichokes, and tomatoes. Even in sunny Spain, it was too ambitious for an amateur volunteer gardener, and there were many failures, leading me to ponder if there was a wider purpose of a school garden. Still, it was a rich experience for all of us. The kids had fun planting and harvesting, and we served some wonderful salads. We created a welcoming venue for a steady rotation of new volunteers, and happily, a new crop of parent volunteers have continued to keep the garden going.

I had discovered and enjoyed a greater connection to the Spanish school community through my volunteer work, so I was happy when Ms. Brie graciously invited me into the MMS garden. Since

then, I have unraveled the mystery of some of those perplexing garden days in Spain. In the MMS Children's Garden, whatever the plan for the day may be, within minutes of the arrival of children you may hear someone exclaim, "I found a bug!" and Ms. Brie responding, "Oh, let's see what it is." Other kids soon follow as if this was the agreed rallying call and down the proverbial rabbit hole they go. Ms. Brie brings out a garden bug chart, magnifying glasses, and a special bug vessel so the kids can investigate up close, from above and below. The group, now focused and settled onto a picnic bench with eyes flitting between the bug chart and the specimen, suddenly looks more like a research group than 3- to 6-year-old Primary students. Ms. Brie guides the excitement with questions — "How many legs does it have? What color is it? Do we have any cabbage plants?" — peppering the conversation with a few facts.

The discoveries are endless. Tidying up a corner of the garden, I moved a pot and there was an enormous earthworm. A child appeared and stated matter-of-factly, "That's an earthworm. He has five hearts" before moving on to his next task. What happens when you leave a pumpkin in the garden? New pumpkins will emerge, and after that pumpkin disintegrates it nourishes the soil, propagates its seeds, and sprouts life anew. Back in Spain, we weeded and I never thought to leave in place a decaying vegetable to serve as the teaching instrument. I now value the benefits of a garden beyond food production, though MMS children experience that, too, during potato, strawberry, and apple harvests. Roasted potatoes are especially coveted by the kids. Our children are experiencing the whole garden process; they observe the connection of the pot worm to the compost worm, the compost worm to the soil, the soil to us, and so on. That's what I had overlooked while waiting for those carrots to grow.

Volunteering in the MMS garden has been an extension of my role as a stay-at-home dad. Caring for the garden is a way to be an active but nonintrusive participant in Gus's school life. I gain glimpses into his world away from home and have enjoyed getting to know MMS staff and parent volunteers. Ms. Brie and I have found a synergy. I help keep the garden in order and make repairs. I keep the prolific Morning Glory at bay so that when someone calls out, "I found something!" Brie can grab her books and charts, hopefully from a level shelf, and accompany these future naturalists and stewards of the planet, over freshly raked garden paths, on their discovery of the world.



My Mission in Malawi

Of all the jobs I learned in Miss Angela's Great Blue Heron classroom at Marin Montessori School, I never would have put "washing board" on the short list for necessary life skills. But here I am, some 18 years later, back at it. To do laundry the proper Malawian way, your day begins before 6 a.m. at the borehole. Bring along a large bucket and a strip of cloth to wrap up turban-like to cushion your head from the weight of the water. Then the pumping (arm muscles) and lifting of the full bucket onto one's head. (I require help with this step—often three women all pushing, laughing, and chiding me when half the water still ends up sloshed all over me. I don't really mind. It's hot.) Finally, the walk home. Perhaps you get used to the weight if you've been doing this your whole life, but to me the whole (long!) walk feels rather like a spine compression exercise. And of course, more water sloshes out as I step, arms burning from their forced over-the-head posturing, leaving me with about a quarter of a bucket left to wash with. And the process repeats. You know you're cleaning clothes the right way if your knuckles feel raw and the molecular structure of your hands has become something like 40% soap. At least clothes on the line dry quickly. Come back in just 20 minutes and even jeans are nice and crispy.

I am here in Malawi, sandwiched between Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique, on a yearlong fellowship to examine barriers to health access for young (under-20) first-time mothers. I live and work amongst the rural Yawo, nestled in amongst boreholes, baked mud bricks, thatch roofs, chickens, rap music, babies, the vowel-heavy ChiYao language, and seemingly infinite numbers of goats. Even after the rains, life is hot and dusty, punctuated by the smoke from cooking fires and burning trash pits. Maize is planted everywhere, but even so this will be a year of hunger. The rains came late, and then there was too much. Flooding took over much of Malawi, reclaiming the mud from houses and displacing hundreds of natives. Now it is March, and the rains should still be here, but they have stopped. Maize kernels are wilting and juvenile, sticking out from yellowing, stunted stalks barely tall enough to reach my chest. Already a bag of maize flour has gone up in price from 3000 to 6000 Malawian kwacha. It will only keep rising.

It is strange how I can both be a part of and separate from life here. I certainly eat and enjoy nsima, a pancake-like paste made from maize flour eaten for lunch and dinner, but I won't go hungry because of the high price of maize. I have an iPhone and a Kindle, and I complain about things like slow Internet access whereas most of the people I live and work with don't even know what email is. Without ever having been to Africa before, arriving here gave me the feeling of being pushed unawares off that one really scary high dive into the ocean. And just as wise Maria Montessori anticipated, creativity has been my saving grace. I came here prepared for a nice little project on malaria in pregnancy. I had a game plan. It was going to be simple. I am amused when I reflect back on my naiveté: since my arrival at the airport in San Francisco way back in August, my life has been an ongoing series of adventures. Perhaps a little known fact about Malawi is that the Malawian embassy in Washington D.C. issues no visas to Americans. Theoretically, to enter the country, an American must be in possession of a return ticket, and can remain in country for no more than 30 days. When I first called the Malawian embassy regarding my 10-month stay, the woman with whom I spoke offered the sage advice that I leave the country every 30 days. Welcome to Malawi!

My life here has become a series of anecdotes. There was my first ever motorcycle ride (awesome), my first trip to Blantyre (the big city!! There's even a traffic light!!), the incident of the bedbugs (in which I slept outside while the house was fumigated), the

incident of the water-spillage on my computer (in which my precious Mac Air was dismantled with a rusty screw driver on top of an old refrigerator by a teenager who'd never seen an Apple product before, pronounced dead, and a new computer acquired), the adoption of a stray kitten (she now goes by "Harper"), the time when I caved and swam too close to shore in the lake (and 6 weeks later found myself popping Prozaquantil to clear my system of Schistosomiasis), my first minibus ride (in which a prayer was spoken upon departure to counter the effects of reckless driving), or the discovery that in Malawi I will henceforth be a vegetarian (following my first encounter with a goat, a dull machete, and meat hanging for days out in the sun with truly glorious quantities of flies). Life is always full here. Each time I think I am getting to know this place, it comes up with something new to surprise me. It doesn't quite feel like home yet, but I have friends and a routine, and the beauty of the landscape and the people continues to amaze me.

Now, nearing the end of March, I am astonished to realize I only have three months left here. I'm not sure where all that time went. Research analysis has begun, as well as the job hunt for next year, and thoughts about returning home. I have often fantasized about that first cappuccino.... A friend I met here told me that once you have taken a sip from a river in Africa, your return is inevitable. Well, I jumped off a 3m high rock into the pool at the base of Mount Mulanje Falls, and the amount of water I took on board should have me set for the next 50 years. So Africa—I may be leaving you shortly, but I am quite sure I will see you again soon.

CLAIRE DONNELLEY
MMS GRADUATE 2004
YALE UNIVERSITY, CLASS OF 2014

Hands-on at Hamilton



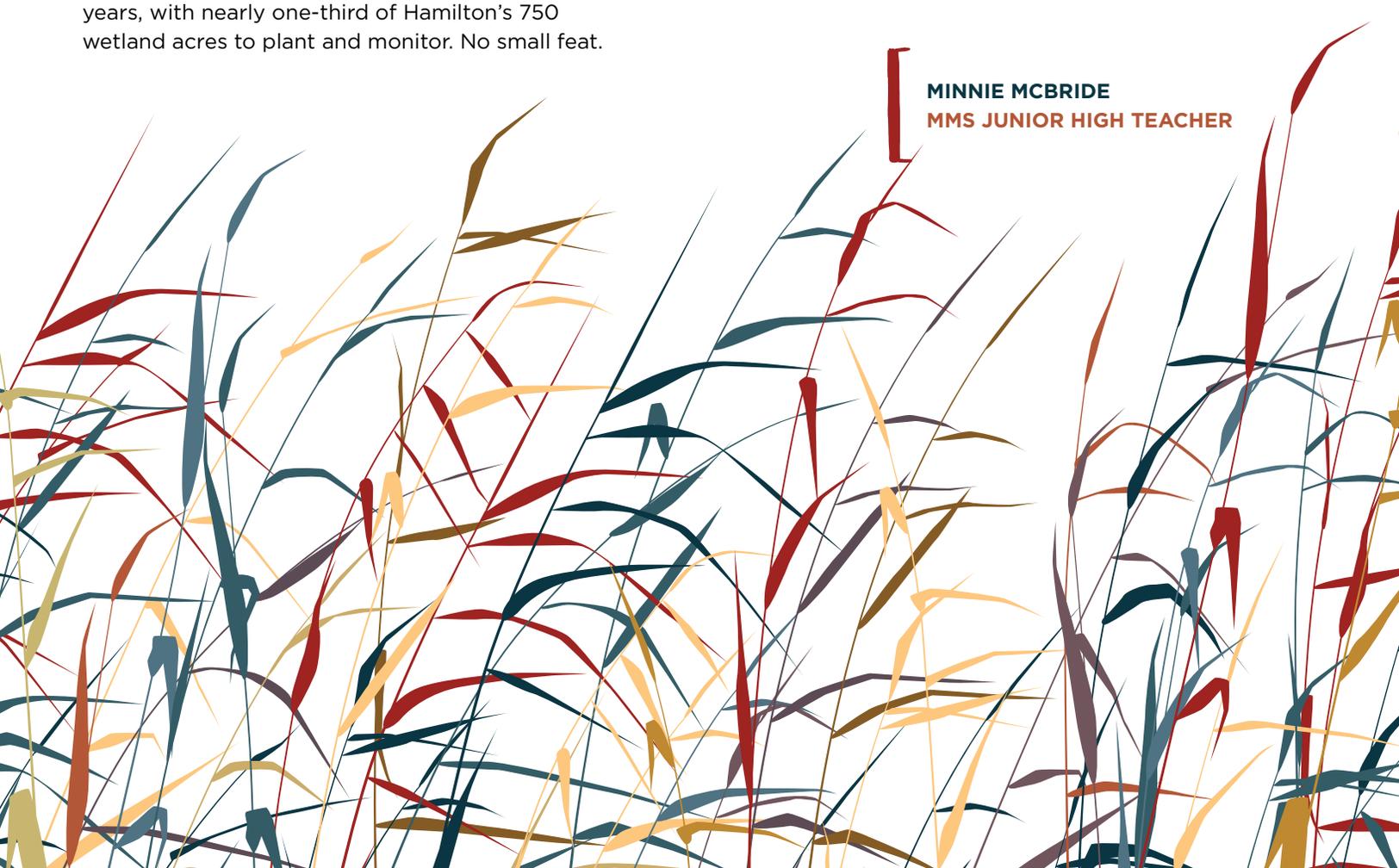
“Okay everyone, we are getting special access to a place not many people get to go,” I tell the crew signed up to do community work at the Hamilton Restoration project in Novato. Brendan gets out of the van and unlocks the large steel gate, then re-locks it behind us. He then continues to help me with the directions that read something like “turn off levee onto dirt road on right, drive around seasonal ponds, parallel the Bay Trail. Look for Golf Cart.” It is while driving into the seasonal pond area that a large flock of birds alights and we feel like we are on safari.

I love the community work aspect of the Junior High. Each Friday afternoon we offer a selection of community work choices, such as volunteering with the Milo Foundation, working with Primary students in Corte Madera, and working in the Bay Garden, and we let students sign up for the work of their choice. This school year is our second year of working with Christina McWhorter, an amazingly upbeat, positive, and energetic woman who is the manager of the Hamilton nursery and also resident native plant expert. I called her “amazingly upbeat” because she is particularly responsible for gathering seeds onsite at several locally approved spots, starting the seeds in beds, and transplanting them into individual plugs. The number of plants she needs is in the tens of thousands, and her plan stretches over multiple years, with nearly one-third of Hamilton’s 750 wetland acres to plant and monitor. No small feat.

During the summer of my Montessori Adolescent Training back in Ohio in 2009, I was charged with examining place-based learning. To do this, I drew a map of the Junior High with concentric circles from St. Vincent’s to the Bay Area that depicted different offerings and options. Internet research from the Midwest allowed me to stumble upon the Hamilton Wetlands Restoration project hundreds of miles away back in California. It turned out that the former Hamilton Air Force Base, later turned into the Novato homestead of Hamilton, was a northern neighbor of ours at St. Vincent’s.

The restoration project has come a long way since my first engagement in their work in 2011. Pioneered by the California State Coastal Conservancy and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in an effort to restore lost wetlands, the condition of the wetlands property has improved as the project has gained momentum. When the levee to the site was ultimately breached last year, the Bay Trail expanded, and a viewing platform and educational signage were installed. Though the Bay Area has lost 90% of its wetlands since the Gold Rush, it is slowly reclaiming them. I am proud to work side-by-side with students and conservationists like Christina McWhorter to help return the largest estuary on the west coast to good health.

MINNIE MCBRIDE
MMS JUNIOR HIGH TEACHER



Friday afternoon arrives, and the week's work is starting to catch up to me. From the van parked on the levee a group of quiet students appear. They are here because they want to be. They are here to help care for the land that they will be, or rather already are, responsible for. Together we are helping to encourage the native vegetation that is beginning to grow in the Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Project. We talk about how the site is developing and what plants we are working with while we catch some interesting observation of the bird behavior overhead or the peculiar spider near some pickleweed.

Since March 2014, I have had the true pleasure of working with students from Minnie McBride's science class at Marin Montessori School's Junior High. The students have contributed their time and energy over many Friday afternoons to help remove invasive plant species from the restoration site, primarily in the northern seasonal wetland habitat. At one time, this land was pristine marsh, then farmland, and then an army airfield. Just a few years ago, after the first stages of the restoration process, this area looked like a sandy moonscape—a blank canvas for the native plant species of a rejuvenated seasonal wetland as well as the many invasive plant species that inevitably infiltrate. If left unmanaged, these invasive species, like tumbleweed

and yellow star thistle, outcompete the natives and ultimately skew the development of the habitat into a less-valuable version of what it could be. Continued land management practices—like those the Marin Montessori students are engaged in—over many years, are required to help steer the habitat development path towards the desired outcome.

MMS Junior High student volunteers are contributing to the restoration process of the Hamilton Wetlands in a direct and critical way. Their work benefits the countless animals and plants that now reside in this restored habitat, and the careful environment that they have helped to cultivate will support animal and plant species for years to come. By the end of a Friday afternoon visit by the students, the site looks better and a mounded trailer full of invasive plants stands ready to be hauled off. Together, we have transformed from a quiet, polite group to a cheerful, sweaty crew of team members working right alongside each other. No longer tired from the week's work, I am eager to keep working—that afternoon, next week, and the next time a Friday afternoon brings a Marin Montessori van onsite. The restorative benefit of the participation of these earnest, hardworking student volunteers extends far beyond the soil and plants they are working with; I feel even more motivated to keep working hard, reassured that this land is in good hands.

CHRISTINA McWHORTER

**VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR AND TEAM LEADER, HAMILTON WETLANDS RESTORATION PROJECT
MANAGER AND NATIVE PLANT EXPERT, HAMILTON WETLANDS NATIVE PLANT NURSERY**

HAMILTON REFLECTION

I chose to sign up for the Hamilton restoration work to help beautify the neighborhood, so that when people come to our area they can see how pretty it is. My favorite work has included pulling invasive weeds and planting native plants.

Christina (McWhorter, Hamilton Native Plant Nursery manager) is nice, kind to everyone, and respectful. She provides helpful background history about Hamilton and makes the work fun.

Two years ago the area was barren and empty of everything but weeds and debris. This year there are flowers popping out everywhere to make the landscape less lonely. When I bike on the path I see many birds flying around in the area that has been restored. It is good to know that our work over these past two years has also been important in helping the animals.

It is fun being out there. The views are pretty. It feels good to help my neighborhood. And I enjoy being part of this important project.

HANNAH JAGODA MMS JUNIOR HIGH STUDENT

In the Spirit of CARING and SHARING MMS 2014-2015 Elementary Fundraisers

SELLING calendars to support saving endangered Honeybees
HOSTING a party to raise funds for Doctors without Borders
during the Ebola crisis WORKING at the food bank in San
Francisco on a Sunday as a family event COLLABORATING in
care of MMS's lower garden, occasionally serving harvested
produce to schoolmates HOSTING a concert and bake sale to
aid victims of Nepal's recent earthquake CARING for the
environment in and out of classrooms RAISING funds to support
an organization that fights poverty and provides healthcare to
people in the Democratic Republic of Congo VOLUNTEERING
at the Marin Food Bank PARTICIPATING in the 2015 ASPCA
Walk-A-Thon COLLECTING and delivering gifts to help Adopt-a-
Family of Marin offer happy holidays to others GATHERING food
through a MMS drive and sorting and packaging food at Marin's
Food Bank to support the local community HOSTING a Farmer's
Market in support of the Richardson Bay Audubon Center
CREATING a bake sale in support of the construction of homes
in Guatemala COORDINATING a used book drive to contribute
to Global Book Exchange's donation to Malawi SPONSORING a
toy drive to benefit children in Guatemala

Tender Shoots Gardening



Each day at Marin Montessori School, the Primary children have the opportunity to practice stewardship in the Children's Garden. As the Garden Teacher, I have the pleasure of watching their faces fill with curiosity and wonder as they explore and discover the richness of nature all around.

The Children's Garden opens in September after the long summer months. When the children arrive for their classroom tours and orientation, they are mesmerized by the changes since they saw it last in June. Gracing the garden are apple trees laden with large, ripe, sweet smelling, juicy fruit. Kiwis hide beneath the large heart shaped leaves suspended on long vines. Pears are succulent and the strawberries, raspberries, and tomatoes ooze with ripeness just waiting to be picked and savored. This begins our abundant harvest season in the garden.

The children are also greeted with a stunning display of pumpkins; several types of squash and gourds are sprawled on the ground with tendrils tightly wrapped around anything in their path. The children are amazed to learn that all of this happened from a seed planted in soil that was watered and fed by the sun. We harvest the pumpkins, collect the seeds, then roast and taste them, enjoying a wonderful healthy snack. Older children are quick to say we need to keep some of the uncooked pumpkin seeds to plant in the spring. The maze of vines that remains on the ground crackles beneath the children's feet. The cleanup of garden debris brings a lot of satisfaction as ten-foot vines are pulled from the ground, loaded into a wagon, hauled, and then hoisted into the compost bin. This is a successful group effort that requires great teamwork, with lots of communication and mutual cooperation.

In the fall, potato harvesting is one of the most popular activities. Children learn how to dig the potatoes and then scrub and cut them into bite size pieces. The potatoes are seasoned with organic rosemary and thyme from the garden and roasted to perfection. The children call these, "the best potatoes in the world," so delicious that some take the recipe home to prepare with their family.

Caring for the birds is a beloved activity throughout the year, most critical in winter when food is scarce. The children observe more birds than they are able to count. They notice when it is time to replenish the bird feeders and are quick to exclaim, "They are eating the food we gave them!" There is a flurry of activity; sparrows of all kinds and mourning doves

swoop in to eat from one of the garden's twelve small vessels. The song sparrow sings in a show of gratitude, and the children quickly go to get the binoculars and bird chart, and sit quietly to observe. Providing fresh water for the birds is essential and there is something very enchanting about watching a bird bathe.

Spring is an exciting time of the year. The children are blossoming more quickly than the flowers that are beginning to bud. Lessons abound about the importance of organic gardening and the significance of bees and pollination to our food supply. Earthworms are nature's farmers, tilling the soil and providing nutrients to grow healthy plants. As the soil begins to warm, the insects, slugs, and snails are beginning to wake from their rest. When the children begin to dig a hole for the strawberry plants, there is movement in the soil. "What is it?" A little more digging and then, a discovery! Hundreds of "roly poly bugs" scatter everywhere and the children tenderly try to scoop them up in their hands. They are enthralled by these odd creatures. "Quick, get the bug catcher! Someone get the magnifying glass!" What started out as a morning with an idea to plant our strawberries quickly becomes fascination with all of our garden creatures - earwigs, ground beetles, wireworms, centipedes, and millipedes, and everyone's very favorite, the earthworm.

This summer while you and your children taste the abundance of your favorite delicious fruits and vegetables, talk about where this food comes from. Many children have gardens to tend at home and can learn so many valuable lessons from watching food grow and harvesting it from the soil. Many edibles can be grown in containers, and children love to care for those, too. Watching the joy in the faces of the 3-to-6-year-olds while they take care of their garden is nothing short of phenomenal. The children are learning to respect, protect, and be good caretakers of the land. I often just sit and observe, taking in each movement and choice, and embracing the uniqueness of each child who works in the garden. It is my honor and privilege.

About Caring

Taking Good Care—Stewardship
for All Ages p. 2

Junk p. 6

Feeling Good Doing Good p. 8

South-of-the-Border Service
Adventure p.10

Ground Level Revelations p.12

My Mission in Malawi p.14

Hands-on at Hamilton p.16

Bayside Engagement p.18

Tender Shoots Gardening p. 20

Jim Munger, Head of School + Cindy Koehn, Publisher and Editor +
Katherine Emery, Photography + i4 Design/Sausalito, Design

www.marinmontessori.org

Marin Montessori School
5200 Paradise Drive
Corte Madera, CA 94925