

# Nursery School News

A Monthly Newsletter of St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School

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## From Jane: Mothering and Perfectionism

Last week's *Newsweek Magazine* (February 21) had an article about a recent book that has apparently really "struck home" with many young mothers in the United States. The name of the book is Perfect Madness by Judith Warner. A number of people immediately e-mailed me about the article knowing my politics on over programmed/stressed out children and parents. Great - some people out there are definitely "getting it!"

The article is worth reading, and probably the book too. Her research was done with women born between 1958 and the early 70's. What she found was mothers who are pretty much spinning their wheels, trying to be "perfect mothers." She compared the angst hidden behind all the hyper control and management of children's lives, obsession with trivia, and the quest to be a perfect mother, to the "perfect wife" in Betty Friedan's classic, *The Feminine Mystique*.

The paradox of it all is that the harder many of today's mothers try, the more depressed, unhappy, and out of control they seem to feel. And worse, she found that many women feel threatened by other women to judge them harshly, and the need to constantly look over their shoulder to make sure that nobody is outdoing them in the performance of "Good Mommyhood." Ugh!

It gets worse - and this is an issue that I do see you folks struggling with. And that is the competition that we are all feeling for our children in today's "winner take all" society. Warner comments on women spending all their time shuttling their

children back and forth to more and more absurd-seeming, high pressured, time demanding, utterly exhausting kids' activities. She writes about the competition for the *best* camps, *best* coaches, *right* ballet class, and of course the *best* schools.

But even if it were possible for us to manage to insure every detail of our children's future, does compulsive over functioning on our part as mothers help our children grow up to be productive independent adults who can go out into the world and create meaningful work and lives? It does not! In fact the paradox of it all is that trying to be perfect usually only back fires into a rigid situation that does not leave enough room for healthy family relationships and balanced lives.

In terms of my own story, I saw my two oldest children, both with a BA in English, end up with *really bad first jobs* that essentially did not involve health insurance or for that matter require a college degree at all.

It sent my son back to law school and my daughter back for a master's in public health.

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## From Jane: (Continued)

And then even with graduate degrees there was a real struggle to find a decent job! But along the way their struggle helped them figure out who they were and what they wanted to be - at least for the time being! When I graduate from college in the '60's an undergraduate degree (from pretty much *any* college) guaranteed a decent job with benefits! Those days are gone. I think that the message that many of us may unwittingly be sending to our children, in our flurry for perfection, is one of how incompetent we see them to be - thus the need as parents to constantly interfere with every detail of their life. And of course if we anxiously "*guide*" every move that our children make, from the friends that they play with to the myriad of activities that they "compete" in, how will they ever have the luxury of discovering their own self. In order to grow up and build a strong sense of self, a child must first feel that they are competent. And for that to happen, paradoxically, they need enough space to make a few mistakes along the way to learn from, and to figure out what they (not their parents) enjoy and what they might actually be good at in life. Your child is a separate person who may ultimately know best what they want in their life. Jobs and spouses may seem like a long way off when your child is in preschool, but the life long journey of separation and individuation begins, whether we like it or not, the moment the umbilical cord is cut.

According to Warner, "Women today have been bred for competition. We were told that we could climb as high as we wanted. We learned to be independent and self-sufficient. To rely on our own initiative and personal responsibility." Warner asks, "Why do so many otherwise competent and self-aware women lose themselves when they become mothers? Why do so many of us feel so out of control? And-the biggest question of all-why has this generation of mothers, arguably the most liberated and privileged group of women America has ever seen, driven themselves crazy in the quest for perfect mommy-dom?"

You were in control as you achieved in the classroom and the workplace. But does that same controlling micro-management translate well to mothering? Warner writes, "Women today mother in the excessive, control-freakish way that they do in part because they are psychologically conditioned to do so. But they also do it because, to a large extent, *they have to*. Because they are unsupported, because their children are not taken care of, in any meaningful way, by society at large. Because there is right now no widespread feeling of social responsibility-for children, for families, for *anyone* really - and so they must take everything onto themselves, they simply go nuts."

Not a very pretty picture. And I really do not see you all in this light. But I do think the pressures today for you to mold your children into some misguided image of perfection is a fairly logical defense against the very real possibility of what society in general has to offer, or perhaps I should say what it lacks to offer.

And once again a paradox raises its head. Perhaps rather than the anxious perfectionism that we may be drawn to, we would be doing ourselves, our children, and our marriages a favor by simply letting go. Again some good advice from Warner, "Throw out the schedules, turn off the cell phone, cancel the tutors. Let's spend some real quality time with our families, just talking, hanging out, not doing anything for once. And let ourselves *be*."



## Kindergarten Readiness Meeting

Last month Bernie Heisey, Foster School kindergarten teacher, was a guest speaker. She shared lots of valuable information about the current expectations for social, emotional, and academic readiness for kindergarten. She explained the schedule for a typical day and gave examples of daily activities.

Clearly the new curriculum is more demanding on all levels. It is important that children enter kindergarten with a beginning knowledge of letters and sounds. It is important that children recognize most letters, have some phonetic awareness (this is the ability make a relationship, or decode, a sound and letter symbol relationship). It is also important that they are beginning to have phonemic awareness (this is the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in words - i.e. boy rhymes with toy - the oy sound is the same. If you ask your child what sounds like dog and they answer cat, rather than for instance log, you need to spend some time playing with word sounds).

It is also important that children are ready to sit for about 30 minutes at a time and focus on paper and pencil activities. It certainly does not mean that children must enter kindergarten already reading and writing, but the pre-skills, such as letter and sound recognition, holding a pencil correctly, writing their name, and a general readiness to sit and attend to fine motor activities for extended periods of time, are pre-requisites for readiness.

As some of you may be aware last year Mindy, Pam, and I visited most of the kindergartens, and as a result have made some small changes that we believe are still appropriate for the children going on to kindergarten. We are careful not to inappropriately "push" children into academics that they are not ready for, and would cause stress and frustration. It is important to find a balance of child initiated play and teacher directed activities for preschool children in order to appropriately challenge individual children. Rather than viewing a child who may not be ready to sit and attend to many pre kindergarten tasks as being deficient, we are more likely to recommend an additional year to grow in preschool.

All the research shows us that pushing young children who are not "ready" for academics tends to cause stress, setting a child up for failure and possible later discipline problems in school. During the preschool years it is important that we understand that many skills are developmental, that skills are acquired at different phases for different children - and children who are "ready for certain academics" earlier, are no more likely to be academically successful later in life than those who are ready a bit later. What matters is that we allow children to complete the stage of development that they are currently working to master, and not foreclose on play and the development of the stage of initiative too early in order to push them into the stage of industry (school readiness) until they are fully ready.

Five year olds need to feel loved and competent. If we push them forward before they are ready we will not be able to do this. Again, Mrs. Heisey emphasized that your child's preschool teacher is probably your best source in terms of making a decision to send your child on to kindergarten. It is not good early childhood educational policy to offer a watered down kindergarten curriculum during preschool, but it is important to be keen observers of readiness skills and for teachers to give appropriate skills for each individual child.

# Mayfair Picnic 2005

Saturday, May 21, 11:00 - 2:00

As I explained in the last newsletter, this year we are going to combine Mayfair with our yearend picnic. Because you all worked so hard and participated in our fall wine tasting fund raiser all we need to do is cover our expenses for Mayfair, we no longer need to use the event to raise funds for the school. At this point we are fortunate enough to simply enjoy our Mayfair as a fun end-of-year party for the children and their families.

In order to cover our expenses admission to Mayfair will be \$5.00. The admission fee will include all of little games with prizes and 3 free tickets, 1 each for the pony ride, train ride, and moon bounce. If children would like to participate in any of the ride activities more than once they may buy extra tickets for \$1.00 each on the day of the fair. Your purchase of an admission ticket will allow you a chance to win the door prize of a hanging basket of flowers, to be presented to the winner at the end of the day.

So participation in the activities will be as follows:

- Moonwalk - 1 ticket
- Train ride - 1 ticket
- Pony rides - 1 ticket
- All games for free
- Balloon designs for free
- Face painting for free

Another change will be that the teachers have offered to staff the games and activity booths this year so that the parents will be free to enjoy the day with their children. If anyone would like to help the teachers out and offer to be a floater to help out with the activities and games - let the Mayfair chairs know.



## Mayfair Plant Sale

Becky Brinch is chairing our plant sale this year. Flyers for perennial pre-orders will be available in the near future. You may pre-order perennials or purchase annuals the day of Mayfair. Many people have found pre-ordering annuals confusing and have suggested that they would like to be able to see the annuals and make their choice at the time of purchase - so the day of Mayfair would be your opportunity to do so. If you are interested in helping sort orders on Friday, May 20<sup>th</sup> or selling annuals the day of Mayfair you should contact Becky Brinch at 412-561-3641.

## Simply St. Paul's Strawberry Jam

Once again Mindy Hudson's classes will be making our "Simply St. Paul's" strawberry jam this year. Contributions of sugar, liquid fruit pectin (Certo) and mason jars (1/2 pint and pint sizes) will be gratefully accepted in the red box in Jane's office. Jars do NOT need to be new, just clean and unbroken. New rings and lids will be purchased. Any questions, ask Mindy.



## Prizes



A wonderful opportunity to get rid of McDonald's or other kids meal give-aways! Drop them off in Jane's office and we'll use them for prizes at Mayfair.

If you would like to volunteer in any way contact either Rosetta Coco at 412-341-6557 or Laverne Duffy at 412-344-2204 - Mayfair 2005 co-chairs.

## Room 6 Restoration

Thank goodness, room 6 is better than ever. So far the sump pump and internal french drain have done the trick! Thank you all for your patience while we completed the indoor construction.

When Paula Harvey retired last year, after spending 12 years teaching in room 6 and enduring lots of flooding issues of 1 kind or another, we gave her a Noah's Arc charm for her charm bracelet! We were able to keep our sense of humor, but admittedly it was growing thin! Hopefully we will not be experiencing anymore flooding.

## Board of Trustees Nominations

Our Board nominating committee is currently looking for parents and community members who would be interested in serving on our Nursery School Board of trustees. We are always particularly interested in people with backgrounds in law, finance, medicine, communications, education, and psychology. If you or anyone that you know would be interested in serving on the Board please contact Sue Baldwin at 412-257-4405 or e-mail her at [Suefle1031@aol.com](mailto:Suefle1031@aol.com).

## Parent Partnership

Mark your calendars for Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup> - 7:30 pm and plan to join us in the Church lounge for an evening parent partnership meeting. All interested parents are invited. We plan to discuss Mayfair plans and Parent Partnership volunteer opportunities for next year. Come for an evening of wine and cheese and find out about ways to help out and get involved. Please RSVP to Diane Riley at (412) 429-3499.





## St. Paul's Web Site

We are currently planning to design a web site for the Nursery School. In an effort to keep costs as reasonable as possible, we are looking for someone who would be interested in working with Kathi Workman and me in order to design our site. If any parent has expertise in this area, or knows someone who does and would be interested in volunteering, please contact me and let me know.



**Mark Your Calendar For St. Paul's Activities and Events**

**March 2005**

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	School Pictures	School Pictures		St. Patrick's Day	Last day of School before Easter Break	19
20 First Day of Spring 	21	22	23	24	25	26
<b>No School Easter Break</b>						
27 	28 First day back to school	29	30 Parent Partnership Meeting 7:30	31		