

# KALEIDOSCOPE

YOUTH INITIATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

WATERSHEDS IN TIME:  
LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

"Look not mournfully  
into the past. It comes  
not back again. Wisely  
improve the present. It is  
thine. Go forth to meet  
the shadowy future, with-  
out fear."

- Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

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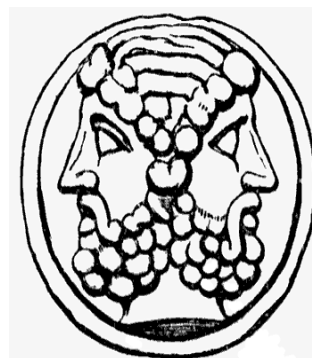
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Every moment of our lives we are poised at the peak of a continental divide, the temporal watershed of our lives. Behind us lies all that has been done: history, formation, decay, evolution – the past. Before us lies everything that will be: accomplishment, failure, inertia, vitality - the future.

In a way we spend every moment as Janus, the Roman god of gates. We look back – perhaps not often enough - and hope to learn from our mistakes, take pride in our successes, and define what we have become by what we have seen. We also look forward – perhaps too much sometimes – with fear, anxiety, hopefulness, purpose.

The Youth Initiative High School finds itself in such a moment and we take as our theme the spirit of the Roman god of the gates - symbol of transition, of past to future, of youth to maturity, of the perpetual cycle of arrival and embarkation. It is the very spirit of adolescence, as the young people we have put at the center of our effort journey from the cloistered world of childhood to the expansiveness of adulthood.

During the summer between our 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> academic years as a school, we look back on the transformations we have undergone and the core principles which have remained the same. What can we learn about our shape from the contours of the past? But we must also look forward. What vision will guide us? What fears must we overcome and what hopes will burn inside us? Who will we become?



Janus, Roman God of the maturation of young people, and, perhaps not coincidentally, representative of the middle ground between barbarity and civilization.

## A TEACHER LOOKING FORWARD

### My Legs Brought me Here by Joel Gordon

The title was a phrase used by Frances Edmunds, founder and president of Emerson College. He explained that the human will, manifesting in our actions and carried out by the limb activity of our arms and legs was, in fact, a spiritual mystery connected to unfolding our destiny in our future. A student arrived at Emerson, Mr. Edmunds said, because his legs brought him there. That in turn had to do with his tasks for that incarnation, but whether he answered that call was, of course, left to his personal freedom. My legs have taken me places where I looked up and wondered just how I got there: Viroqua, Wisconsin. I know this time my limbs were purposefully directed. *(continued on page 3)*

## A TEACHER LOOKING BACK

In this broken and confused world, the Youth Initiative High School has been a haven for me, a beacon of hope for the idea that people can truly work harmoniously and selflessly for something beyond themselves. YIHS helped me to believe in human nature.

It was nine years ago, in 1999, when I moved to Coon Valley from New York City. I heard the school needed an English teacher, and I said sure. I arrived on a day when the students were choosing their new English class. It was chaos. Each of four teachers was expected to make a presentation on what they would be teaching, then the students could pick the class they wanted. When I told one of the other teachers that I planned to teach Crime and Punishment, she rolled her eyes and said the kids wouldn't read such a long book. Somehow about a dozen signed up and we had a class, and they all read it (or at least most of it).

The place sucked me in deeper and deeper. First I taught English, then History, then Social Studies. Even Phy Ed for a semester. I became a Board member, then Board President. Suddenly I was calling all of my friends and asking them for money so we could pay the electricity bill. Every night it seemed there was a meeting to go to or a class to prepare. I loved all of it, loved to watch the school grow from 19 to 55 over the years that I served on the Board.

We spend our lives as part of organizations, but most of us never see our own part in them as truly essential and valuable. I worked many different jobs, from cutting lawn to Wall Street stock picker, before coming to YIHS, but this was a first place that I didn't cash my pay checks if I felt the school needed the money more than me. And in the nature of things, it generally did. The school gave me more than money; it gave me the sense that I was needed, irreplaceable. And in its smallness and poverty and intimacy, it can give every student, parent, and teacher that same feeling. And being needed and being loved so close to each other that I can honestly say our school teaches people to love each other.

I was in my late 20s, alone and able. It was easy enough to support myself, but I had nobody to do for, nobody to serve. And to be happy you have to serve somebody. Serving yourself is never enough. I learned this at age 28, alongside people half my age who were learning the same thing. YIHS doesn't graduate perfect people, but any student who spends more than a few months of sincere effort at our school learns the beautiful revivifying power of doing for others.

"I have accepted forever that I am responsible for the beings that surround me"

One of the many myths of our youth-loving culture is that the high school years are the "best years of your life." What is meant by this, I suppose, is that having one's adult powers (driving, working, dating) without adult responsibilities allows one to be carefree and adventurous. As a teacher at Youth Initiative, I saw that the teen years are the time when we learn how to serve and love each other, because that is the only thing that really lasts in life.

So now I have my own family and farm and I'm only teaching one class, a religion class, to the 12th graders, next year. I didn't quit and I wasn't fired. Just as once the school taught me to feel necessary, it now releases me to be a volunteer again. With 2 people, 6 cats, 14 cows, 7 pigs, and a goat looking to me for support and sustenance, I can't go to three meetings a week and be ready to teach every morning, but thanks to my time at Youth Initiative I know how to stay with a project, and I have accepted forever that I am responsible for the beings that surround me.



- Lars Bergan, YIHS teacher

## A TEACHER LOOKING FORWARD (CONT.)



Depiction of a weekly YIHS faculty meeting

Once on a business trip in a Palo Alto hotel I was served mashed potatoes with a steak dinner. They were notably tasteless, and I wondered if future generations will know “potato”, the real thing, the fragrance of a warm, fully baked “batata”. Now, some years down the road, the answer emerged: GMO’s, GMF’s, “Frankenfoods”. Twenty years later I sat watching the six o’clock news. As commercials came on, I reached for the remote to surf. I’d seen the spots for over the counter headache, stomachache, arthritis remedies, but now it was for prescription meds: appetite loss, insomnia, bulging this, sclerotic that, and my absolute favorite, restless leg syndrome. As my legs twitched in sympathy, I found myself astride my bike, pedaling and fretting about what had happened to normal healthy people. Treat symptoms not causes?

Fast forward to last summer as I was doing a bad job at being retired. It seemed restless leg syndrome had entered my astral body and my will was chafing. Three things came together on a hot summer evening as Paul and I sat around grilling steaks on his patio: The scene in “The Matrix” showing fields of human embryos being grown by machines, 112 out of 133 predictions of George Orwell’s 1984 have come to pass, and Paul’s input from the biomedical frontier taken from a Scientific American article on nanotechnology and how microprocessors are being grown on living human tissue. But really, let’s pooh-pooh those puerile conspiracy theories.

So I biked a few miles and sat on the grassy bank of a lake. A few ducks waggled over to beg. Emerson wrote in his essay, *The American Scholar*, “We will walk on our own feet, we will work with our own hands, we will speak our own minds...”

The old conflict: fashion a human being into an obedient machine or a free thinking spiritual being. Its core was the ubiquitous narrowing and hardening of human beings that lay on my crusader’s heart; political correctness made it appear innocuous, as did mono-cultural sovereign states acting like machines, choices funneled into one option...coming down the tube. And this was the reason I became a teacher: to shed light on an alternative path, to champion personal liberty, flexible thinking, a love of beauty, open-endedness, and all the rest. I tossed some sunflower seeds to the ducks and pedaled.

The speeding pace of daily life, proliferation of electronic thinking, demise of conversation, behaviorism, political correctness and the equivocation triumph of all time: ethical relativism. So I put my stuff in storage, packed, and went to England for six months to walk the dog and think.

I cast a wide net on Waldorfworld, exchanging emails with a dozen or more communities, scanning over 60 openings for teachers and administrators. I radically revised my CV to reflect exactly what I wanted. Then I came across this statement: “The students shared a desire for a school that would be academically challenging, respectful of individual dignity and freedom, and rooted in a meaningful sense of community and shared responsibility.” Phrases popped out: students were on the Personnel Committee, Board of Trustees, handled the practical tasks at the school. Hmmm. I emailed my rather pointed cover letter and CV to Jacob Hundt and the rest they say, is history.

The Viroqua community’s outreach has been warm and heartfelt and I feel welcomed by it. Both feet now stand on the red granite of Wisconsin’s earth and ready, as a YIHS teacher said in his first e-mail: “Welcome to YIHS. Now get to work.” Well said; I suppose his legs also brought him here.

“We will walk on our own feet,  
we will work with our own  
hands, we will speak our own  
minds...”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

- Joel Gordon, YIHS teacher



## STUDENTS LOOKING FORWARD

"I hope to become more involved with the school next year, and by doing that I hope to help it move forward in a positive fashion...It is an incredible experience when it is your responsibility as a student body to create fundraisers for the school. I love YIHS, I love being there, and I look forward with happiness for the years to come."

-Brenna Troy, Sophomore

"I will be coming into my junior year and as an upperclassman I would like to help the students become more in tune with the school and make sure that the students are aware that their school needs them but also that the students need their school."

-Katie Diaz, Junior

"Whatever happens, I am happy to be a part of a school where I can find myself, whoever that is."

-Merla Wainscott, Sophomore

"I hope to become a valuable asset for the school in the time that I am here. I am very grateful to be a member of this community and hope that it stays that way."

-David Shrum, Sophomore

"School has always been an institution I've claimed to detest, but I love the people at YIHS. And *that* is the reason that I want to come back."

-Nicholas Gilgenbach, Senior

"This fall I will be serving on the board, which means I will be proudly in a position to make decisions involving the school's improvement...I would like to make sure everyone stays aware of their opportunities and freedoms, by keeping people engaged and setting an example."

-Kaisa Cummings, Junior



YIHS students parade and distribute flyers with relief information to Viola residents in June

## A STUDENT LOOKING BACK

I am the Poster Child for Youth Initiative High School. But more importantly, who isn't? One of the most beautiful properties of YIHS is that the product of such an education is immeasurable by common standards.

My fellow classmates and those before and after me have gone on to pursue a wide variety of paths; building their own businesses; working as fitness instructors; becoming midwives; picking peaches in Oregon; attending art schools, universities, and Eurythmy training; selling cutlery; farming; marrying; making babies; and traveling the world. There is no way to sum up the expectations for those who graduate from YIHS other than that they follow their own life visions, hold community and compassion in their hearts, and aim to contribute to this planet in a meaningful way.

The gift that Youth Initiative has given me is confidence that I know what is truly important to me in this world. Whether that is organic farming, working with battered women, being a conscious and respectful world traveler or spreading the power of knowledge through quality news reporting; I aim to change the world for the better.

I have been helping my little brother, Tristan, fill out his application for the school. Rules and bylaws have changed since I attended, but the basic principles remain. What YIHS represented for me and now represents for Tristan is Opportunity, and there is nothing more inspiring and meaningful to a young person. I couldn't be more excited for him.

-Tegan Wendland, class of 2004

"The gift that Youth Initiative has given me is confidence that I know what is truly important to me in this world."





## A BOARD MEMBER LOOKING BACKWARD

In July of 1996, a small group of high school students and their parents that had been meeting over the summer made a decision. YES, we will start a high school. We will open in the fall – less than 60 days away.

We started as a one-room school, room 207 to be exact, with eleven students grades 9-12. It was an exciting, grueling and chaotic time. There was no board, faculty or administration – just a group of parents, students and community members working very hard in the process of creation.

The Waldorf model of creating a school is for those interested to meet for several years hammering out the details before opening the school. We were not willing to wait, we had students who wanted a school NOW, so we built the boat while we were sailing it.

Those of us who were involved wore many different hats. Depending on the meeting, and there were a lot them, we were curriculum planners, teacher and student recruiters, steering committee members, teachers, budget planners and visionaries. Almost all the teaching done that year was donated. Everyone gave 100%, because we knew that we were all necessary to get this school off the ground. They say that fools rush in where angels fear to tread – but I believe the angels were right with us in the process.

I'm sure there were a number of people who raised their eyebrows and shook their heads at what we were attempting. But we were much too busy to take much notice. There were so many decisions to be made. Who would be our students, who would be our teachers? How would we finance the school? How would we govern the school? What would our curriculum be? What did we imagine our school to be like in the future and how would we get there? After many, many hours of meetings, we did open our school in September with eleven students, ten young men (including my two eldest sons) and one (!) young woman. There was much work ahead of us.

**"We built the boat while we were sailing it"**

The students were an integral part of creating the school. Because of this, a different organizational structure emerged – with students actively participating in all aspects of the school. Parents and teachers worked along side students toward a common goal – creating a school that is uniquely ours, "creating an environment which encourages and assists students in becoming free thinkers, and in maturing into active response-able, empowered participants in the greater society."

The early years were chaotic, no doubt about it. I think people who work together to create something new have to be comfortable with chaos. Creation arises out of chaos, and to work formlessness into form requires faith, vision, patience and perseverance. I was grateful and amazed those first students and their parents were willing to join together in this experiment. For there were no guarantees, no track record. We had a willingness to trust each other and keep working at it. (continued on next page)

**"It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."  
- St. Francis of Assisi**



## A BOARD MEMBER LOOKING BACK (CONT.)

In *Creating Caring & Capable Boards* by Katherine Tyler, Katherine outlines the stages that NPO's (non profit organizations) go through. The first stage is the stage of creation.

"Even when very experienced professionals are involved, at this stage there is a pervasive sense of the unknown, of new beginnings, *of emergence into a disordered place of vast potential* that harbors hope and a strong belief that their efforts will make a difference."

This chaotic creation stage is a necessary phase. No matter how long you plan, it isn't until you jump into the unknown that you really discover what you're dealing with.

But you can't stay in this phase very long. It isn't sustainable. Social forms, agreements, structure, a level of consistency are needed to keep things going. Teachers won't teach for free for very long. Students, parents and teachers need to know clearly what is expected of them. Finances must be planned, books and equipment purchased. We found that students needed rules so they knew what was expected. Students also needed a consistent adult presence – in the midst of many new teachers, there needed to be at least one familiar face that was present every day. So the school evolved, as any group must in order to sustain itself. Having Conrad Rehbach serve as school coordinator was a major step out of the chaos and into a more formed structure, and with Jacob Hundt coming on as a full time teacher we were entering the next stage of our growth.

According to Katherine Tyler, the second stage is called "Institutionalization." The central question for groups in this stage is, "Is this organization viable?" In other words, is our school sustainable? Some of the key issues are:

- Establishment of structure, methods, procedures
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Development of programs
- Management of power

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"No matter how long you plan, it isn't until you jump into the unknown that you really discover what you're dealing with."



YHS students serve food at multicultural bazaar during Theme Week

## A BOARD MEMBER LOOKING BACK (CONT.)

A major challenge of this phase is learning to retain the vitality of the creation phase during the transition to a new phase of organization and accountability.

From 2005 - 08 I was served on the Board of Trustees of YIHS. And many of you know, we had a rocky period during some of that time. As I look back over the difficulties and pain we experienced, I believe much of it was due to our collective inattention to policy and process, a necessary part of the stage we were in. I said at the time that the pain we were experiencing was not just growing pains, but labor pains, and we were being asked to birth a new way of being as a school community.

During this past year at YIHS, the school community as a whole embraced this stage of 'institutionalization.' I was continually amazed as every committee and governing body stepped up to the work of defining roles, responsibilities, methods and programs. If I tried to list them all I'm sure I would leave something out. It was a marvelous and awesome thing to witness, especially given the additional challenge of Conrad's departure.

What is the next stage – are we there yet – what challenges and issues are ahead? That's for you, the school community to explore. I have full confidence that you will continue to do so in astounding ways.

It was my privilege to be a part of this school's beginnings and its unfolding. The school was a place of learning and growth not only for my five children who attended, but for me as well. After eleven years of involvement in the school, I decided it was my turn to "graduate". I am grateful for the wonderful opportunity I had to experience the truth of Margaret Mead's statement:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Blessings on your journey,  
Charlene Elderkin

## A BOARD MEMBER LOOKING FORWARD

The Board of Trustees held their annual retreat in July to become acquainted with each other and to orient new members to the work of the board. As a new member, it was gratifying to spend the day with student and adult representatives who are enthusiastic about our unique school. I moved to Viroqua in 1996 so my daughter could begin kindergarten at Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School, located next door to our Youth Initiative High School. Also in 1996, the Youth Initiative High School was born. I accepted a part-time teaching position at the new school. Unfortunately I could not stay for more than a year as the meager salary did not cover my living expenses. Nevertheless, teachers continue to appear to serve our youth, and I hope to someday be in a position to teach a class too. In the meantime, serving as a parent volunteer keeps me busy and happy!

At our board retreat, we discussed a planning tool furnished to us by AWSNA called SWOT: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Each of us was asked to list the Youth Initiative High School's internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats. Some issues can be seen as both strengths and weaknesses, for example, we rely heavily on volunteerism. Volunteerism can be viewed as a strength as we are able to keep our costs low and parents and students involved. Seen as a weakness, however, people are called on to do more than they comfortably can, and even with many trying hard, projects and programs we'd like to see happen do not for lack of people to do them.

Last year one of my school volunteer contributions was to coordinate the lovely annual fundraiser Valentine's Dinner, when students serve an elegant meal and provide entertainment to our guests. I have volunteered to coordinate the dinner again in 2009. I would like to see this event include an invitation to 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents in particular to come to our school for a look-see. Educating parents about Waldorf inspired high school education is a service to them and to our school. As visitors from ASWNA commented, our school has many positive characteristics. At the same time, our school can appear chaotic to visiting parents and students, I think that this is partly the nature of adolescents and partly the result of keeping our form open enough to allow students real responsibility to step up and make the school their own. This last year, we had administrator turn over (weakness) and floods in our community 2 years in a row (threat). Despite our rough year, we continued to work to build a future together (strength) At our annual school meeting in May 2008, the Youth Initiative High School community ended the school year in a very good frame of mind (strength and opportunity). I admire our resiliency, a good model for our children. I am on the Board of Trustees for a three year term. I will serve my final year one year after my daughter graduates from the Youth Initiative High School. I look forward to continuing my connection to and work for this amazing school for years to come. I encourage everyone reading this to participate fully in the life of the school through volunteerism and monetary contributions. Blessings on our staff, students, faculty and parents.

Trish Dougherty,

YIHS Board Member and Parent



## A STUDENT LOOKING BACK

## A World of Possibilities

When I began school at Youth Initiative, I felt a startling thrill. It was the thrill of knowing I had an abundance of possibilities. I remember receiving my first elective form and being blown away by how many choices I had. This feeling made me burst with enthusiasm, because I came from a school that had very few choices. I knew conventional schooling was right for some people, but not for me. I no longer wanted my education laid out for me, I wanted choices. My excitement continued as I learned with teachers and students who had appreciation and respect for one another. I had unlimited resources and support to create things for others and myself. Whether it was an independent study, or a wacky fashion day, I could make it happen. Little did I know, these events were on a small scale, and what the future held would be even greater.

In the middle of my junior year I started thinking about traveling. After missing the cut off for our schools bi-annual Guatemala trip, I was inspired to make plans of my own to travel to a Spanish speaking country. I was becoming increasingly fond of the Spanish language, and I wanted to experience the culture that came with it. Although my junior year was ending, I knew if I worked hard I could squeeze the trip into my senior year. I took Spanish lessons most of the summer and I began to become more comfortable with the language. When my senior year began,



Eva, Talia, Eva, & Madeleine during their time in Costa Rica

Months later, I found myself in the breathtaking hills of Costa Rica on an organic farm with three of my classmates. Every morning we worked for four hours, doing a different job every day. We planted and weeded vegetables and herbs, cooked meals with locals, and fed and took care of their animals. The work was demanding, but enjoyable.

We worked with locals and other volunteers from around the world. Travelers also came to take Spanish lessons at the farm's language school. As we worked and ate meals with them, we exchanged life stories. Many were surprised to hear that we were still in high school. They were also impressed that our school made it easy for us to travel internationally without putting us knee deep in assignments. All four of us were proud to represent our school and tell the people we met about it. During the three weeks on the farm, we didn't meet one traveler that was younger than us.

The trip was rewarding in exactly the ways I imagined it to be. I felt stronger, more independent, and full of new knowledge I was ready to share. The sensation of exploring my possibilities and creating memorable experiences from them is one that never died in my time at Youth Initiative.

Talia Winningham, class of 2008,

"I felt stronger, more independent, and full of new knowledge | was ready to share."

I spoke with my teachers and administrators about my idea. They all were very helpful. At no point in the process was I doubted, only encouraged and assisted. Everyone had suggestions and people for me to talk to. For many weeks, my Spanish teacher came after school to help me further my skills. As I continued planning my trip, I watched my peers plan trips to other places and receive the same help. I knew the knowledge and experience we would receive on our journeys would bring new flavor to our education, and would help us grow to be stronger and more independent individuals. At most conventional schools, traveling abroad for educational purposes would be difficult or impossible, unless it's a school program. Because most schools use accredited systems, a student would have to complete many extra assignments, or take extra courses. The pressure of completing mounds of homework while you're away immersing yourself in a culture detracts from the experience. I knew I would have a few assignments for my trip, but they would be practical and I would enjoy doing them while away.

WE'RE ON THE WEB  
WWW.YIHS.NET



## YOUTH INITIATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

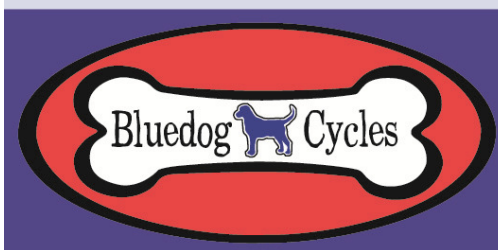
500 E. JEFFERSON ST. #302  
VIROQUA, WI 54665

PHONE: 608-629-6464  
E-MAIL: YIHS@YIHS.NET

**A Developing member of the Association  
of Waldorf Schools of North America**

## MATCHING GIFT PROGRAM

As a school we are very conscious of our membership in a local community and a wider world. We try to teach our students this both in the classroom and in their fundraising work. Our Matching Gift Campaign is an excellent illustration of what can be accomplished through the hard work of the student body and the support of businesses and individuals in our immediate community and beyond. Established in 2005-2006 the Matching Gift Program allows the students of this school to amplify their hard work by partnering with generous members of the community. For every dollar raised by the students in 2007-2008 members of the community added \$2.30. The students raised just over \$10,000 for a grand total of \$33,000. We are proud of our students, grateful to our community and our goal is to grow the program this year from 2.3:1 to an ambitious 3:1. If you, your business, or someone you know would like to join our students in being the architects and builders of their own education please contact the development office at 608-637-3915 for more information.



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