

KALEIDOSCOPE

HIGHLIGHTS

We could say that we've made it through another year at YIHS, but that wouldn't be entirely accurate. We've more than made it through – we have achieved, succeeded, grown, overcome, and above all, we have learned. The challenges and opportunities that we are given are not always of our choosing but we face them with all the intelligence, creativity, and compassion that we can muster—and with a community like ours we can muster a whole lot.



YIHS students know that they can lean on one another.

A CHALLENGE MET

SUBSTANCES AND ADOLESCENCE BY LIZ COX

How did you get where you are today? What path did you take? Are you happy? Are you able to bring your whole self to whatever you are doing? As adults, in some respects we are walking paths we chose years ago. Our teens are, at this very moment, in the process of choosing the paths they will walk for years to come, and their options have increased substantially in the last decades.

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GLOBAL CLASSROOM

YIHS senior Kaisa Cummings spent two months in India this year doing service at a woman's shelter. This is one of her blog entries while she was there. Photos by Kaisa.



YIHS alumna Kaisa Cummings

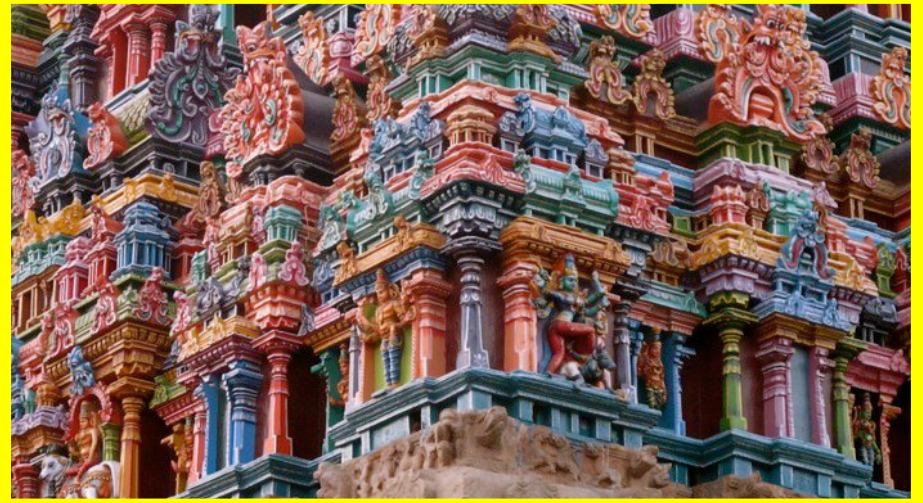
Being in India is like discovering remnants of summer forgotten in the white pocket of winter; everything is tinged with the sweetness of that fleeting, pivotal season. Fighting homesickness is easy with a head full of memories like a gallery of paintings. Outside wafts the pungent smell of barnyard fomented in the daytime heat and cultivated by the row of milk cows like those I liked to sit on as a child. The feel of my wet hair on my shoulders after swimming in the Arabian sea could've been the ice-cold creek that runs through the valley after a day of sweat and dust. When I close my eyes, the bath water air of dusk could be that of late June in Wisconsin, complete with frog songs and crickets. Remembrance is sweet and fleeting--keeping me nourished in this new land, away from everything I have known, lived, and observed for so long (or not so long). Nostalgia is sweet and torturing like a seashore deserted by all but you.



Being pulled from the vivid present into the past is exhausting and often leaves me with a heartache as I'm wrenched forth from evocative flashbacks by something harshly defining of my HERE and NOW; of February in India: the jingling bells on women's anklets, canned Bollywood music at 6 a.m., half naked children crying in Tamil, the songs of exotic birds, the rush of wind so warm it could drive someone crazy...

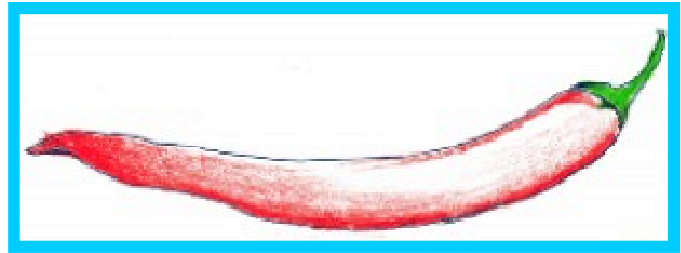
Perhaps I should be trying harder to absorb the present instead of allowing time to roll back the wheels of my mind, but I have come to believe that to travel is not to leave yourself behind. The mind can never be newly crafted- no matter how drastic the change of locale, culture, routine. You can never really leave it all behind.

My perceptions have not changed in India. I am not trying to rid myself of anything troubling or untangle the spiderwebs of yore sticking to my fingers. I am not trying to figure it all out or sew up the world's bloody gashes. I am instead deepening meanings, looking at things more three-dimensionally, and recharging. I am mixing all the new with the old in a collage of images full of truth and poetry that will feel good digesting for the rest of my life. I'm learning lessons from the skinny-legged farmers tending goats, the beautiful women balancing baskets on their heads, the children who have never seen skin as light as mine, and the cows with horns painted blue like Krishna. I could not recount in any logical or philosophical manner what precisely I am discovering and filing away in my mind--my gallery--but I can share with you the poetry and elegies hidden in the motions of those living their lives and navigating their own paths with a hand of cards so randomly dealt to them. I can show you how life clings to their heels like a shadow: unique as a thumbprint, mysterious, and dark. I am not looking for heart-stopping or heart jump-starting. If I stumble upon anything that rakes through the embers and sets something smoldering then all the better, but I am not looking for any fillers of voids or chasers of demons, just time to read the world's most multidimensional country like a good book, write it all down, and rediscover the good in the steadiness of home. You can't miss it until it's gone.



OUR PLATE IS FULL— THE WHOLE PLATE IS SERVED BY SHAWN LAVOIE

I was proud to announce to the students sitting somewhat sleepily at morning circle during the last week of school that their Nutrition class—the 4-year foods and nutrition main lesson they have with Jane Siemon—is going to Toronto, Canada and Rochester, New York. No, Jane's not moving, but her curriculum, *The Whole Plate: A Return to Real Food*, is on the move. After our first marketing push, schools "out there" are beginning to take interest in this unique curriculum, and we hope to continue to share it around the country (and world!).



The Spice of Life--Unit 4 of the Whole Plate--teaches herbs and spices from around the world. This pepper is a student drawing from Jane's 12th grade class.

At Youth Initiative we have really been spoiled for the last 14 years by our integrated cooking and nutrition classes. Most schools do not have classes that teach the differences between conventional and organic food production and the manifold names of sugar on labels while also baking trout and preparing homemade pizza. What sets the nutrition curriculum apart in our school is its global perspective on food: where does it come from, how was it grown, how is it prepared, and how does it benefit our health? From the farm, to the kitchen to the classroom, our students see the connections between a healthy planet and their personal health. So we are selling *The Whole Plate* not only to raise money for the school but also to spark an educational movement.

At the National Farm to School Conference in Detroit, MI, Dawn Hundt and I spoke to hundreds of people about this curriculum and were amazed by its potential. The conference itself was an inspirational gathering of educators, farmers, cafeteria staff, and policy makers, all trying to bring more fresh and local foods into school lunches. What I saw was an abundance of resources and energy being placed on elementary and middle school-aged children, exemplified by school garden projects. In school gardens kids have an experience growing fresh foods and form a vital connection to the source of their lunch. Stories abound of the child seeing a carrot for the first time or tasting a raw beet and smiling. These primary encounters with foods are essential to shaping our "food consciousness." But what happens after 8th grade?

That's where many people in the Farm to School movement shake their head—just as we have all, at some point, shaken our heads thinking about adolescents—and wonder about how to engage students beyond the school garden.



(Continued on page 9)

PRACTICING PARENTING - GETTING TO GRADUATION BY TRISH DOUGHERTY

Trish Dougherty is the parent of Katie Diaz and a member of the YIHS Board of Trustees

My daughter graduated from the YIHS in the Class of 2010, completing our 14 year odyssey through Waldorf Education in Viroqua. I have been guided through parenting to date by many friends and credos, these in particular:

"It is the kid's job to test limits; the parent's job to adjust limits."

-Toni Hathaway, friend and parent

Adjustments can be needed rapidly one after another as teens' needs and skills change, both forward and backward. Discussing limits with other parents gave me useful perspectives.

The appreciation the students and faculty and administrator expressed for each other at the annual YIHS end of the year school meeting and at graduation showed me that the faculty, too, are masters of adjusting and expanding limits to encourage and celebrate growth.

*"That the Self advances and confirms the ten thousand things is called delusion;
That the ten thousand things advance and confirm the self is called enlightenment."*

-Dogen Zenji

The children testing limits and the parents and teachers and community welcoming the testing, guiding the testing--indeed the ten thousand things advance. And the students create such beauty as a result--art, plays, newly painted rooms, beautiful music, good food, creative senior projects.

One beauty of our students' education is the breadth of teaching style and setting they experience. Program director Jacob Hundt expressed his pleasure in his day gardening with two students while teaching them the history of agriculture. Education happens everywhere and all the time. This school year we had nearly as many teachers come through the school as we had students, a personnel committee and administrative feat, and such resources for the students. My daughter's desire to learn massage at the end of the school year turned into an independent study course, guided by yet another teacher, 12th grade parent, Marie Smith.

Some of the things that advance are hard beyond words--family and community tragedies.

*"I beg to urge you everyone,
Life and death are a grave matter,
All things pass quickly away.
Each of you must be completely alert,
Never neglectful,
Never indulgent."*

-Evening closing verse at sesshin (retreat), Diamond Sangah



Katie Diaz, now a YIHS alumna

How have 14 years passed since that little girl entered kindergarten? Many of her high school classmates she met that day. And suddenly these beautiful young adults are giving their Class of 2010 graduation speeches. Though parenting is different now, the ten thousand things continue to advance.

GRADUATION 2010



GRADUATION AS FEAST DAY

BY JACOB HUNDT

It is said that in Medieval times nearly 100 days of each year were set aside for some kind of feast, sabbath, or ceremonial occasion. The calendar was amply studded with the commemorations of saints or events of sacred history, as well as with the hinges of the agricultural year, just as individual lives were marked by a multitude of personal rituals and each day was organized by the tolling bells and recitation of particular prayers. We can imagine that such practices helped to give a textured, meaningful structure to each person's experience of time, just as the feudal order gave structure to society and the consecration of sacred ground gave structure to space.

We moderns, on the other hand, are much less likely to stand on ceremonies of any kind, spatial, social, or temporal. In contrast to our ancestors, our feast days and really significant ceremonial occasions have dwindled to a precious few – weddings, funerals, and graduations and 2 or 3 important holidays celebrated in particular ways within particular families. The Youth Initiative High School, it might be argued, carries this trend towards informality farther than most institutions. This is, after all, a school with no school bell and no letter grades, in which students address their teachers familiarly by their first names.

As the number of ritual actions and occasions decrease, however, there is a sense in which those that remain become more powerful and significant. The Morning Verse, for example, can be used invoke the very essence of the school in any place or situation when properly recited by a circle of students and teachers, as we did recently at the UW hospital in Madison where I went with a school group to visit senior Freya Hemingway. Another example of such a condensation of ceremonial

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BLAST OFF!

WHERE OUR GRADUATES ARE GOING FOR NOW

- ♥ **Judy Fox**—Judy plans to attend the University of Santa Cruz, following her passion and obvious talent for photography.
 - ♥ **Freya Hemingway**—Freya plans to study medicine at the University of Minnesota.
 - ♥ **Sirsha Erickson**—Sirsha is off to exotic locales during a tour of the globe.
 - ♥ **Thea Park**—Thea is coming up with a plan—she assures us.
 - ♥ **Ethan Wickert**—Ethan will spend his first year after high school honing his skills as a biodynamic farmer under the tutelage of his father.
 - ♥ **Alex Vikemyr**—Alex Vikemyr intends to travel and explore a career in music.
 - ♥ **Leo Cox**—Leo is headed to California for an internship at a vineyard in Napa, CA.
 - ♥ **Katie Diaz**—Katie will attend massage school
- and use her trade to pay her way through four year college studying psychology.
- ♥ **Kaisa Cummings**—Kaisa will be attending university and studying literature and creative writing.
 - ♥ **Eamon Heberlein**—Eamon is off to the illustrious Deep Springs in Nevada and from there to travels in Asia and Africa.
 - ♥ **Rebecca Smith**—Rebecca will be formulating a plan.

Anna Thea Park

Ethan Wickert

Alex Vikemyr

Katie Diaz

Kaisa Cummings

Sirsha Erickson

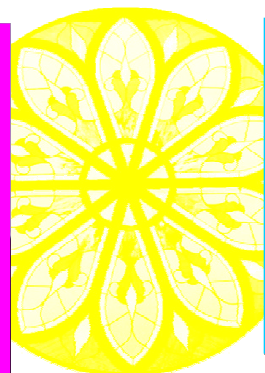
Freya Hemingway

Judy Fox

Leo Cox

Eamon Heberlein

Rebecca Smith



GRADUATION -(CONT.)

(Continued from page 6)

significance is the annual YIHS graduation ceremony. May 30, 2010, saw the 14th graduation day in the history of the school, and over those years this ceremony has developed a particular set of ritual actions and associations, as well as a devoted following of community members who attend each year, regardless of who is graduating.

Unlike the Morning Verse, the setting of the graduation is important. With the exception of the very first graduation in 1997, which was held immediately following the performance of the spring play, with the 3 graduates still in full costume and stage make up, most graduations have been held out doors in a beautiful farm or park setting, most recently at the home of Ben and Julee Agar. The atmosphere of graduation is thus powerfully saturated with the warm sunlight and exploding life of early summer. The graduates accentuate and emphasize the fecund efflorescence of this time by making and wearing May crowns of willow and flowers, lending the scene the whimsical air of baroque pastoral.

But the business at hand is serious—the graduation, like all of the major life -rituals, is a threshold ceremony. For the parents, teachers, and community, this is the moment in which our children are released out to the world, to sink or swim, and the quality of our parenting and mentorship is about to become apparent. For the graduates, on the other hand, it is a brief moment to turn on the threshold, look back, and reflect on their journey through childhood and adolescence. Accordingly, the centerpiece, the climactic moment of the YIHS graduation comes when the graduates speak. One by one they come the podium and individually speak their piece. Anyone who has attended a YIHS graduation knows how powerful and memorable these short speeches are, emphasizing both the individuality and unique character of each graduate and the vessel of the school and community that has helped them to reach this point. As a teacher, the graduation is one of the important sources of personal renewal and spiritual rededication that helps to carry me through the following school year. In this way, the graduation is truly a modern feast day, a sacred moment in the round of the year without which the school and our work together would lose some of its form and meaning.



WHOLE PLATE- (CONT.)

(Continued from page 4)

In our view, the teenager is primed for a different, yet no less radical, experience with their food: building on those primary encounters in the garden, they need to confront food anew in the kitchen and the classroom. Learning how to cook and learning about the history and politics of the food system are empowering—yes, empowering—to high school students. Cooking prepares them for life outside of their parents home, for a time when they will purchase ingredients with their own “food dollars” and prepare their own meals. Thinking about food production, federal subsidies, the persistence of pesticides, and the carbon food print of our modern industrial system grounds students in the political present and lights up their burgeoning intellectual powers. And then, with this analytical perspective on the food system, students can align their food choices with their deepest values.

Many educators at the conference were excited about what we are doing at YIHS and pointed out potential uses for this curriculum; not only in the Family and Consumer Science classes, but also in “team teaching” environments, in sciences classes, in afterschool programs, and as an accompaniment to garden-based education.

On our way back, we stopped in at the Catherine Ferguson Academy, a high school for pregnant mothers in Detroit. Behind their dark brick school building, which houses both the high school and day care, was a 4-acre school farm, complete with a horse pasture, bunnies, goats, a duck pond, an orchard, compost heap and numerous raised beds in full bloom. Being in their garden, surrounded by scores of abandoned overgrown lots, reminded me more of Vernon County than Motown, and gave me a strange sense of hope in the future: even when things break down, people still know how to feed themselves.

I return feeling blessed to live in this lush, progressive part of the world, and also inspired to share some piece of Youth Initiative with the wider world. *The Whole Plate* is back on the move this month as we head to the National Charter School Conference in Chicago, and I hope to report more sales through out the summer.

Jane Siemon, developing a curriculum with a captivated audience.

Check out the curriculum on our website: www.wholeplate.org



"Grown in Detroit" is a new documentary film about urban ag and teenage mothers in Detroit. We met the students and principal of the school that that film focused on.



(Continued from page 1)

We know, for example, that here in Viroqua any teen can acquire any drug he or she desires: alcohol, cannabis, ecstasy, lsd, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, the list goes on. This has been the case for a long time here and it is not a secret. Although this news can be shocking to parents of toddlers, I don't think the facts are unusual for any community, anywhere nowadays. Some parents would like to remain oblivious though, which seems perfectly natural in a community that works hard to isolate itself from the perversities of modern culture.

We also know that there is a huge range of ideas about substance use among the adults in this community. There are adults who are daily drug users and weekend partiers and there are adults who don't even ingest caffeine. There are parents who want the drug dogs called in for regular searches and parents who host teen parties. Most of us have checkered histories, and whatever they contain, our paths brought us here together, baggage and all.

The world of parenting can feel like a constant battle of forces both within and beyond ourselves. What occurs to me over and over is that as parents of teens we are taking on the battle against external forces and often neglecting our own internal conflicts. As adults we often seem to be operating at the same maturity level, using the same fall-back behaviors as our kids—this goes for individual adults, and, sometimes, institutional groups. For all of us, making the shift from dealing with young children into dealing with teens requires a great effort of will and self-examination.

This past fall, when there was an incident of marijuana use at school, after the initial outrage passed there was a long period of waiting. The big questions of who and why were not resolved, and the consequence of this action ultimately was taken on by the entire student body in the form of a closed campus for three weeks. It sounds like a straightforward sequence of events, but in fact it was a very messy affair, fraught with failed expectations and miscommunications. We learned a lot about ourselves as adult members of an organization, and a lot about how much responsibility our students are really ready for.

One of the biggest revelations for me throughout this whole year was that the *subject* of substance use is taboo, but the *fact* of substance use is basically assumed. Apparently, we're supposed to simultaneously know and not know about substance use in our community, and we're supposed to be OK with bringing up our kids that way.

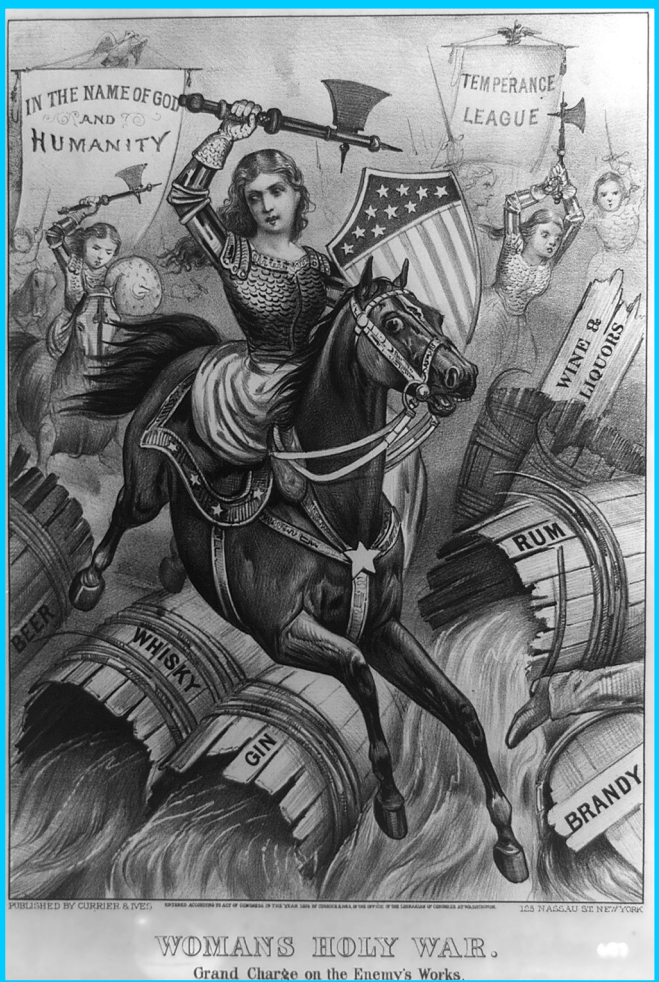


Image from a lecture on the history of alcohol during the YIHS Drugs class.

Instead of buying into that scenario, after the fall-out from the perceived collective punishment and lack of institutional fortitude to find and prosecute the perpetrator died down, our school moved into a period of information discovery, discussion and analysis. We organized a panel discussion about substance use and adolescence in our community, to which we invited everyone from former addicts to therapists and law enforcement officials, and had a revealing, if too brief, discussion.

Our faculty took on the job of preparing a course called “Drugs: Science, Philosophy, Politics, and You”. The syllabus covered questions like “What is consciousness? How do you think? What is a drug? How does the human brain develop? What is addiction? Why are some drugs illegal? What are the political, legal and economic impacts of the production, transportation and consumption of illegal drugs?” Our faculty members educated themselves and their students and brought in several guest speakers to address specific topics.

As a school dealing with substance use, (and I don’t know of a school that *doesn’t* have to deal with it), especially a Waldorf school, part of our work is to help each other understand the aspects of the human being that are being either replaced or “accessed” through the use of substances. Coping with pain and discomfort is something modern culture has conditioned us to medicate and avoid. Feeling socially awkward just means we need a couple of beers to dance or have a conversation. We are replacing or “accessing” our capacities to recognize and connect with the spiritual parts of ourselves and each other. Looked at through a lens of Anthroposophy, part of the work of our age is to move beyond a reliance on substances and into a deliberate and conscious relationship with the spiritual world in order to connect with our own humanity and with each other. The beginnings of this work started last year. The challenge is to continue learning about ourselves and to use that information to inform our actions.

Many other benefits came out of last year’s events. We understand even better the need for communications training for our students. We understand where our policies are weak and where our implementation needs bolstering. And, above all, we realized the strength and empowerment that come from bringing into public discussion the issues that nobody wants to talk about! Stay tuned.



Map used during the YIHS drugs class to illustrate the effects of the cocaine trade on political instability in Colombia.



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