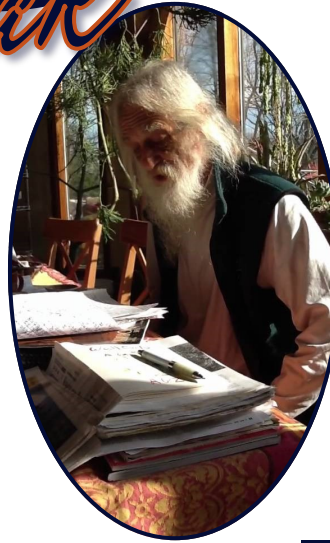


KALEIDOSCOPE

Summer 2015

Elders Speak



L to R: Tom Vanderhyden, Philothea Bezin, Jerome McGeorge, Julee Caspars Agar, honored in retirement at the 2015 Graduation, are just four of the many elders who have shared their vision with YIHS.

We are awash with knowledge, yet thirsty for wisdom. A thousand times a day we are titillated with a neural blast of something new, interesting, free. We incessantly check prices on eBay, weather on radar, and status updates on social media. We don't stop to take the long view, to see where we are going in our lives, to appreciate this moment in the history of the world. In this issue we take the *elder perspective*.

At Youth Initiative we too can become infatuated with the new. Youthful exuberance perpetually emanates from the halls attuning us to the rise and fall of the moment--the new song, look, joke, skateboard trick. Our classes too provide a three-week deluge of new ideas and experiences that keep us all afloat in a sea of newness. Yet we also prize profundity and routinely take time to reflect.

In a culture that prizes progress above all else, in fact sees progress as an end in itself, we risk cutting ourselves off from wisdom traditions. Wisdom complements knowledge, tempers its urgency and short-sightedness with calm and perspective. The pursuit of knowledge alone is a trivial pursuit. Wisdom, however, runs deep.

Let's go together now into those dark waters.

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The Fierce Urgency of Now

BY JEROME McGEORGE

Jerome McGeorge was a guiding light in the establishment of YIHS and has taught there for nearly 20 years. His vision and wisdom have been and continue to be a touchstone for dozens of students and teachers. He gave the following speech at the annual Organic Valley Earth Dinner.

I am fiercely passionate about the urgency of Now. Yet I also heard Wendell Berry advising us at a CROPP/Organic Valley Annual Meeting: "In times of crisis, resolution may come from calm dialogue, reflections, and examining not only thought, but feelings...also our Heart Mind."

This morning I was in a Youth Initiative High School classroom with 15 bright, beautiful Juniors (almost all of them are here tonight as our serving staff)...exploring the wonders of the Mayan Calendar. Our study of Native American cultures has among its many themes: the cultures of Indigenous Americans emphasizes qualities of living and being alive. The European world emphasizes getting/accumulating...a profound difference.

On this same theme but from a different perspective I ask you to image: "Columbus with his underclass gang of sailors coming into the unknown Caribbean world. All taught to pray for the release from pain and suffering, from their sinful, perilous existence to enter an Afterlife in the paradise of Heaven." Next image: "The Arawak people paddling out to meet the Big Ships, full of curiosity and hospitality...as beings Alive in Paradise."

A second major theme from Native Cultures: "The past and the future are always with us...the destiny of Seven Generations, ahead and behind." Some others might speak of Karma, cycles as circles in the mystery of Time.

Just over a century ago William James said: "The chief characteristic of Modern Civilization is the sacrifice of the Future for the Present." A brief, brilliant summary of the Fierce Urgency of Now then, so much worse today as Ecocide (the murder of the living environment) accelerates, the tragedy of Civilization and Its Discontents promises more mass Death.

The false doctrine of human dominion is one drive of Ecocide, human overpopulation another, there are multiple factors in this tragedy, civilization. A modern guide would be Elizabeth Kolbert, especially her text *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. Be ambitious and read *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View* by Richard Tarnas, a text with major impacts upon my thoughts which inspires a film now in the making: *Changing of the Gods: Planetary and Human Revolutions*, addressing the essence of our shared tragedy, suggesting the essence of New Myth, emphasizing Revolutions in Consciousness.

Tonight in honor of Earth Mother and All My Relations, I offer four Resolutions for Revolutions in our Consciousness:

- 1) ReEnchant Kosmos
- 2) ReInhabit Paradise

- 3) ReExamine our life-denying, life-destroying lifestyles
- 4) Realize Transpersonal Consciousness

Perhaps the foundational flaw of the Scientific World View is to disenchant Kosmos, to project a Universe that is no more than transactions of matter, of mass and energy. The scientists assure us they are diligently looking for other intelligent life in this Universe. They are blind. Kosmos is saturated with Consciousness, unimaginable intelligences, planetary and star beings, galactic minds, as the Mayan Shamans knew, as the I Ching teaches. Consider that the Kosmos is in a state of Perfect Balance, creation and destruction, birth and death. From this perspective, human extinction becomes part of the balancing. Listen to Einstein who said, "We must recover our capacity for Awe and Reverence." We must ReEnchant Kosmos.

Reinhabit Paradise, one source of New Myth or how we recover from being removed, being banished from the Garden. We will have to reject Old Myth which dictates that males have to work until their brow sweats, females must bear their children in pain, serpents

deserve to be trampled, that humans have dominion over creation...In the New Story we have stopped sacrificing the future, rather we are once again Cherishing Posterity, we are making gardens in harmony with Earth, recovering from Separation Anxiety and Self-Centeredness, both as a species and as individuals to re-enter the Garden of Earthly Delights, the bliss of Oneness re-inhabiting Paradise in a radically New World Order inspired by New Myth...Or continue as victims of What Be False in Old Myth in a march to more mass extinctions, including our own...so many of the marchers suffering from denial and undiagnosed delusions of Anthropocentrism and Narcissism, the Lie of Progress. Remember--Paradise is a human construct. Carl Jung said, "God needs Man." Goddess and Gods exist within mythic patterns, always subject to cultural alterations.

Economics must equal Ecologics--a formulation which may serve as both informing goals and as the ideal outcome, while we examine and reexamine our total lifestyle impacts. Currently, the Owning Class of International Corporate Control determines that Economics equal Ecocide. Does that make you fiercely urgent? Are you motivated to lessen your life-denying and life-destroying behavior? We must emerge from the dense Materialism, the dominance of Capitalistic thinking that Greed is Good, Getting and Accumulating are ultimate goals. We can emerge from more Being Alive...as members one of another yet each do our part...embracing the Mind of our Heart.

The heart of Transpersonal Consciousness is Selfless love, a shift beyond normal human development and Ego boundaries into higher states of Awakening, Empathy and Compassion, becoming wishless at a personal level, walking on a Path of Love Wisdom, growing greater capacity for Greater Good. From the 10th century ShantiDeva summarizes in The Bodhisatva Way of Life: "All suffering in the world arises from seeking happiness for Self, All happiness arises from seeking happiness for Others."

A Bodhisatva models Transpersonal Consciousness--selfless, empathic with mastery of Loving Presence, combining Christ-consciousness and Buddha-nature, compassionate Love in Action.



YIHS Class of 2015

Between me and thee--Earth is a
Garden to grow who we be.
Now I ask you to join me
as a Bodhisatva Wanna-be.

Swimming Lessons

BY MATTHEW VOZ

This commencement speech was given to the graduating class of 2015 at their graduation ceremony this past May.

Greetings and congratulations to all those graduating from our class of 2015. Before I begin I would like to give a little time over to those who are not up here with us today but, who, nevertheless, had a profound impact on this class and this school. Though they rotated to other pastures they will forever be remembered fondly as one among us. Gideon Schmidt, Elijah Kolenko, Derek Tromp, Noah Gullion, and Byron Fanning will always be a part of the narrative of this class's journey and they deserve our thoughts today as well. For those that survived the full four year emotional and academic gauntlet that is YIHS, you have done so much more than survive. A strong class coming into the 9th grade, with the greasy yet noble paw prints of Steve Lawless distinctly visible, this class has only continued to build from the foundation that was laid by everyone's favorite gentle giant. So let's also take a moment to recognize Steve Lawless, great man.

Today is a special day, marked most distinctly by a profound bittersweetness. I have been around long enough now that the illusion we will always be intimates has evaporated. The myth that 20 years from now we'll be smoking cigars and drinking bourbon in a den together, or that I'll be bouncing your babies on my knee pales in probability to the fact that, after this summer fades into autumn, I may never see most of you again but in passing. You have lived your lives under the watchful and loving eye of this school these past four years. Today we not only celebrate our four years together we also, ceremoniously, turn our gaze away from you. As two fellow-travelers at a crossroads, today we part ways with heavy hearts. Though the words and embraces we share today are swollen with meaning and memory, we know as soon as they are offered that they will not be enough to fill the hole created by your absence as you leave our little valley both geographically and metaphorically.

Because you have lived your lives in this valley, where you awoke from the abyss as the sun rose in the east. Cold and naked in the dew of morning, the fog that draped itself over the vanishing hibernaculum of the night obscured your eyes as you were taken up into the arms of your parents. As the sun began to rise above the horizon you teetered about beneath the mighty oaks and ash of childhood, learning the smells of the rotting leaves and the blooming flowers. There you were reared and met others like you, some of them sitting next to you today. As the sun began to climb through the sky you mastered your bodies and marched to the edge of the forest. You came to this place, this school, this life between childhood and adulthood, a clearing where the sun shone brightly and illuminated things obscured by the shadows of innocence. For a time the sharp glint of the sun stung your eyes but as the pupil of your mind contracted you could see the mountains in the distance, and nearby you heard the rushing song of a river. You felt a thirst, and you moved methodically but persistently toward the eastern bank of the river - sometimes hand in hand with a teacher or friend, sometimes alone as it must be. All the while you looked about you and learned, down into the ground you looked, up in to the sky, you looked into your neighbor's eye and then into your own, and now you have reached the bank of this wide, swift river. Indeed, some of you have even kneeled and drawn its water to your lips.

Now it is time to test the waters, to wade in. Some of you will go off now to college or make forays into the world and feel the stiff, cold current of adulthood on your legs. Deeper and deeper you will go through time. You will lose the grasp of your classmates' hands, the voice of your parents from the edge of the wood will be but a whisper in the midst of the current's rush. Adventures will come, and children, and careers, and challenge, and loss. Some days you will wake to find that you cannot breathe, that you are completely submerged beneath the coursing waters. You will look up and see the sun, the light that has guided you, now in the middle of the sky, but only faintly piercing the foamy river. This is adulthood, and not everyone emerges intact. Some, having come unmoored by the torrents of nihilism, are swept away to the sea, others, cumbered by the weight of unsatisfied purpose, sink forever to the riverbed. It is here amongst the darting fishes and the swirling flotsam, in the whitewater of independence that you will need to learn how to swim.



Sometimes you forget the dreams of the forest in keeping your head above the water. Sometimes there is nothing but the swimming and you won't have time to ask "where to" or "why". Eventually, if you do it right, you will reach the western bank where you can dry yourself in the setting sun. From there you can consider what lies beyond the mountains that crowd the western horizon, or look back with contentment at the forest in the east. Eventually the sun hides its light behind the earth and night returns to the valley.

So that is one metaphor: that life is essentially a task, to get from one side of the river to the other without drowning. But this is a commencement speech at a high school graduation and that is not a very inspiring metaphor.

So what is the meaning of life? Well, don't ask me, I'm the guy flailing my arms out in the middle of the river, just trying to keep water out of my lungs. There's not often a day in my house when someone doesn't cry (it's usually a child), when I get home at night I'm not reading Plato's Dialogues, I'm watching playoff basketball and falling asleep with my face in a bowl of potato chips, some days the greatest injustice in the world isn't global warming or

human trafficking – it's a broken dishwasher or a vomiting child or an angry phone call from a parent. You might call that the pinnacle of bourgeois spiritual vacancy (or at least that's what my 18 year-old-self would have said) but I don't refrain from questioning the universe because I don't want to, it's because I don't have to. I've done my questioning and I've made my decisions. Each morning my purpose is clearly laid out before me – to love and provide for my family and to do everything I can to make this school as great as it can be. It might not be much but it keeps me afloat. I never ask myself why I am swimming because I've been able to store the answer in the fibrous memory of my muscles. Serving the master that I have chosen has become a reflex.

Creating a life where purpose and meaning are structural components of everyday existence is the primary ingredient of a happy life. That's why these years from 16-24 are so crucial. Because as you stand in the meadow astride the eastern bank of this river you must construct your own unique mechanism in the tiny filaments of your personality, your beliefs, and your habits. You must gain the experience and education you will need to put yourselves in the place you want to be. You must learn how to guide your actions and discipline your thoughts in order to ensure that you are righteous and just. You must develop inside you an ethical and philosophical reflex to ensure that when the water is frigid, and the current is a tempest, there will be no doubt in your mind and in your heart that, for your own particular reasons, you must keep swimming.

As you loiter here on the banks of this river you have already begun to build your 35- and 45- and 55-year-old selves. Your task today and in the years soon to come is not so much to teach yourself how to swim but to figure out why and to come up with a sound reason to get in the water in the first place. Some people will tarry on the eastern bank until life has passed them by. You know the types: the guy playing Grand Theft Auto in his parents' basement at 39 years old or the 40-something bar fly that still has her prom corsage hanging from the rear view mirror of her 1998 2-door Pontiac Grand Am. These children in middle-aged bodies, these individuals that roam the eastern waterfront act as undead reminders that no matter how fast the current or cold the water – you must get in. So as you now embark on this treacherous journey, one that will test you in ways that you cannot now imagine, I would be so bold as to offer you a few tips for your preparation.

Firstly, when you are searching for this purpose in swimming, whatever you do, do not look across the river for the answer. There are two things that lie across that river – old people and death. The people sunning themselves on the western shore and thinking fondly of the good old days don't have the answers to your problems. Their world is not your world and your battles are not their battles. Like any river, the river of time is constantly changing and the river that they have crossed is not the river you will enter. As for death, none of

us know what is beyond the western mountains, perhaps there is a land of plenty and peace, perhaps another forest and another river, perhaps there is simply nothing. Do not listen to those who would place your duty beyond your brothers and sisters and the creatures of this valley.

Secondly, there will be times when your arms tire and your lungs burn, when a log from upstream cracks you in the head or a snapping turtle takes some meat off of you. When life gets tough, the temptation to curl up into a ball and float down the river to less troubled waters will be a strong one, and, in the moment, a very logical inclination. When things are really bad somewhere chances are good that they are better somewhere else, right? But the premise of this logic is flawed because the heres and theres and somewheres are irrelevant. They don't matter. Things aren't better downriver. You can't run away from yourself. Instead I would ask you to consider the words of Viktor Frankl, a man who learned a thing or two about the human condition: "When we are no longer able to change a situation - we are challenged to change ourselves." My apologies to the motivational poster industry but most of the things in the world can't actually be changed. People die, relationships fracture, unemployment fluctuates, dishwashers break. Sometimes treading water is all you can do and no one ever got stronger or better by being a coward. Never run away, if you leave, leave on your terms.

And finally, nothing founders faster than a person without a sense of humor. Laughter is an armor, a lubricant, a scalpel, and a salve, indeed, laughter is the best personal floatation device available to you as you ford these treacherous waters. Just as we humans are the only creatures cursed by the philosophical brutality of self-awareness our recompense is that we alone can laugh in the face of death and in the arms of joy. The greatest gift of the human spirit is to laugh. To laugh is to be strong, to define the world in accordance with your will, to be, despite an undertow which tries constantly to submerge you, defiantly alive. This river will take much from you, but you must never let it take your laughter. It has been a great honor to help lead you to the banks of this great river of adulthood but my greatest joy has been to laugh with you on the way there. Now, the sun reaches toward noon, the sky is bright, and the water is invigorating - let's go for a swim.

Pearls from a Parting Parent

BY DEAN STAFFANSON

Dean Staffanson is the father of two YIHS alumni, his youngest child, Eleanore, graduated from YIHS this past May.

I emailed Matt Voz, "When I write this piece for the Kaleidoscope, who do I imagine is the audience?"

He replied in an email, "Youth, Earth, the future."

"Well," I thought, "that narrowed it down nicely."

So, listen up! You may skip reading this if you are an old, extraterrestrial, who came here from the past. The rest of you may read on.

On graduation day I heard my daughter, Eleanore, boasting about having her picture taken with the school administrator, Matt Voz. How different, I thought, from my experience. When I graduated from high school, I could not have cared less about the principal of my high school. But, of course, Youth Initiative is different. And, I am grateful for the many differences. It was heard in the words of the students after receiving their diplomas: "Be willing to change it" (meaning the school). And, again speaking of the school: "It is not about showing what you know, but learning to grow." And, speaking of themselves let's just sum it up as one student did: "We are going to be one kick-ass generation." *Well, what do you think?* I think these statements portray some of what is special about this school, and are indicative of some of the best of what education is about.

Furthermore, as I wrote this I thought about the school and my children's experience, and my experience, and I felt blessed. My time here has included pot lucks, parent meetings, care groups, cleaning

days, painting walls and doors, picking up garbage along County 56 for service week, chaperoning my daughter's class to the Field Museum in Chicago, watching plays, "Truth be Told," and senior presentations, selling concessions, two graduation ceremonies, and becoming a fanatic for the girls' volleyball team. *Who could ask for more?*

And, now I marvel at the thick three-ring binder that is my daughter's "transcript." There are four years of class and theme-week descriptions with individual teacher assessments of Eleanore's participation. Each subject's teacher investing time in describing how she did well, and how she can improve. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the devotion, knowledge and compassion shown in these thoughtful, time-spent evaluations. It is clear each teacher inspired, challenged and modeled what it takes to be a learner—passionate about what they are teaching.

What follows are my "three pearls" and I offer them not only to the new graduates, but as reminders to the rest of us.

Pearl one: "Practice the back float."

Matt Voz's 2015 commencement speech included an insightful description of what comes next for the graduates—a jump into the river of life. And, too often I believe we make this "swim" into an exhausting, head-down race. This reminded me of a poem by Philip Booth titled "The First Lesson." Please look it up, but here is the last line: "...remember when fear cramps your heart what I told you: lie gently and wide to the light-year stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you." Whether it is the river or the sea of life—this is called "the first lesson," because we need it all through life. We need to know on our thrash through life's unpredictable waters to also back float, breathe, and trust.

Pearl two: "Practice gratitude—and think of it as an action." I work as a hospice chaplain and people at the end-of-life often share with me reflections on their life. An 83-year-old hospice patient, who had a chronic illness for over twenty years, said, "You look back, it's not the big things that are that important—the weddings, the graduations. It's the little things—how people have helped you in all sorts of ways—so many ways. And, I hope I thanked them, but most of them are gone now." This patient voiced the importance of expressing gratitude before it is too late. And, think of gratitude as an action, not just a feeling-state, the feeling of being blessed or grateful to be alive. Gratitude in its fullness comes when you direct it toward somebody. A routine "thank you" is not the same as a robust "thank you"—heartfelt, particular and eye-to-eye.

Pearl three: "Choose to be happy." The best advice I have for young people (and maybe the rest of us) comes from a 2011 Commencement Address at Earlham College. Andy Moore, Geoscience Professor, told the graduating class: "Your lives are unlikely to take you where you thought they would; you will be called upon to do things you know you cannot do, but for which there is no one else to do them; and you will find guidance from unlikely sources. Choose to be happy when you can, forgive yourself when you can't, and keep an eye out for people who are happy. They are worth knowing, whoever they are."

These pearls are for the swim. They are offered as a small kind of thanks to Youth Initiative, a school that has asked my children to show initiative, and I realize now—me too! And, I am so happy they did. – Well, for now I will be back-floating down around the bend, but don't count me out.





Letters to a Memory

BY JUSTYS GRENIER

Graduating seniors Justys Grenier and Izzi Xiques both underwent monumental changes during their four years at YIHS. As part of our “Elders Speak” theme they were asked to write a letter as an elder to their 9th Grade selves imparting the wisdom that they have gained.

Dear Freshman Justys,

9th Grade Justys, like most freshmen, looking like he has all the answers.

Listen up bud, here you are. It’s been a long eight years of school and I get that. Summers were short and winters were long and spring was always beautiful. You worked your way to graduating from Pleasant Ridge and now you are again at the bottom of the barrel. Respect has to be earned if you are going to climb the ladder to the top and out again. Just for the record, throwing backpacks,

notebooks or any other belongings of anyone else out windows does not often warrant respect. Nor do crude drawings, talking over others in class, or talking over the teachers in class; it’s really not worth it. It doesn’t give you the kind of attention that you are looking for.

Instead, strive to be the best you that you can be. Trust me on this one. Some more advice: accept what the gods (your parents) have chosen for you for your education, it’s definitely the right place to be. Why did you even want to go to public school anyway? Because I have completely forgotten. I’ve been incredibly lucky to have spent my time at this place – Es un lugar sin igual– it is all I could have asked for in a high school experience and more.

The people here are the most wonderful people in the world, and every year there are more of them! I was blessed so much to have a class like I did. I have learned from and with every one of them in so many countless ways. We all grew and transformed together and now the world will receive some indescribable people that I will miss very much (but I will see them again soon, I know.) You are lucky you know. You get to spend the next four years with those people, and grow with them as you become me.... Okay, this is getting weird.

Anyway back to advice and stuff, just think before you say, do, and act because most of the time you make a fool of yourself. But also don’t think too much, just relax and go with the flow, and don’t forget to listen. Listen to everyone and everything if you can. Learn in your own ways about the words ownership, nature, double entendre, integrity, truth, friendship, and love. I have more words now, but you will find all of them cannot even come close to describing the feeling of graduating and you will feel it one day, all very surreal.

When it comes to food, dude, just wash your dishes. Don’t try to come in there and do all the dishes one day to try and make up that karma. You know you didn’t wash as many as you left. But I guess you’ll make up for 10 lifetimes worth of dishwashing karma at the Driftless Café. Ahhhh



Justys the Graduate: cool, composed, quietly confident.

more good people, show your gratitude by working hard.... And stop breaking wine glasses even though you haven't even started yet. While we're on the stops – stop eating 25 cent Maruchan Ramen noodles, they will rot your body from the inside out. As a substitute, bring in some raw materials, meat delicacies, raw vegetables, fancy spices etc. Throw them all into a pan and make those beautiful hallways smell like something besides blue paint, asbestos, wet feet and occasionally pigeon crap. Eat good because you are what you eat.

You will reach a step in your growth where you realize that every situation needs a reaction, and especially not a negative reaction. You can ask the universe for all the signs you want, but in the end, we see what we want to see when we're ready to see it. And you will see it may be a drag on some occasions and seconds may never tick slower, but I promise you once it's over there is no going back and it all flies by so fast that you'll be where I am in the blink of an eye. So slow down, take a few deep breaths and enjoy the moment you are in, because that's what matters. Presence. Be present with the people you love, and make sure they know you love them. Give ALL the love you can away and let it come back to you as you do. When you're up, it's never as good as it seems. When you're down you never think you'll be up again. But life goes on. Here I am. Here I go. Where to? I do not know.

Sincerely,
Senior Justys Grenier

BY IZZI XIQUES

Dear 9th-Grade Izzi,

For you, high school has just begun, for me it has just ended. There is a world of difference between me and you, plus the four years of Youth Initiative that divides us. You will know soon how much of a difference that makes.

Right now you are anxiety ridden and you think you are incapable of the things you want to achieve for yourself. It is ok to be afraid but it is not ok to hide from what you fear, especially when what you fear is also what you want most. You haven't admitted it to yourself

yet but you want a successful life, you want to do what you love. You are capable of that, more than capable, you are fantastic at it. I know it is scary to think of putting yourself out there in front of the world and showing them what you can do, but the world awaits.

Soon you will find the people you fear are actually the ones who support you the most. You will find that a good education is not about showing what you know but *learning* what you want and need to know about this life. You will find that perspective is one of the most important things you need to maintain in your life. You must always be pushing your perspective and consciousness towards a broader spectrum. This is the key to not being afraid and the key to finding satisfaction. At least this is what 'just graduated' you says, so I'd take it with a grain of salt. You will find that an open heart and an open mind will take you across the world and back.



Yours Truly,

Izzi the Graduate

Wisdom is a Creation, not a Gift

BY SHAWN LAVOIE

A special chair is reserved at the table of YIHS Elders for Rudolf Steiner, who continues to challenge us and guide our work. I recently read *A Grand Metamorphosis: Contributions to the Spiritual-Scientific Anthropology and Education of Adolescents* by Danish anthroposophist Peter Selg who used as a basis for his study the faculty meeting notes from the first Waldorf high school. There he found a straight-talking Steiner, helping teachers knee-deep in the struggle to understand adolescents and their own role as educators. Selg's compilation of Steiner's advice bears the mark of true wisdom and strikes to the heart of education today. Right from the start, Steiner admonishes the “clever” educational theorists of his day, stating that they need a healthy dose of shame—shame for their hubristic propounding of clever ideas, new technology, stricter standards, innovative methods... Sound familiar? Then as now, this cleverness misses the point. The art of



education, according to Steiner, has its locus in the teacher-student relationship.

Speaking to the teachers, Steiner framed the relationship in this way: "The students will educate themselves through us" (pg. 42). Simple, yes, but not step-by-step instructions. What did he mean?

It could mean, quite simply, that students get stuff to learn through teachers. In the current educational idiom: “Self-directed learners” need teachers to provide them curricular content and standards-based challenges. Teachers, to use another contemporary piece of jargon, “deliver content.” Students, then, consume the content. Of course, this is one aspect of what teachers do, but it only describes the surface. Observe a lively

classroom and you will see teachers bringing in content and the students exploring, dissecting, and synthesizing it. But why is it working? Content gets dumped on us all the time and most often it only inspires us to tune-out or change the channel. If all Steiner had meant was that teachers need to be fine-tuned content delivery machines, he'd have merely predicted the discovery of internet and the explosion of on-line learning. (No small feat!)

However, in my reading of this statement, Steiner is proposing something more radical. This is not a consumer-producer relationship: The teacher and the student are both active. Teachers are not pandering to the students. Students are not being molded in the image of the teacher. Both are transformed by the encounter.

For the students going through adolescence, their fundamental educational purpose is to find a foothold in the world. Their bodies take on adult form and their sense of themselves as active, creative, responsible agents in the adult world blossoms. Their drive to educate themselves is truly a mission to understand the world in all its complexity so that they can find their own place within it.

Yet, to make this transition students need guidance. This guidance, Steiner clearly points out, is not a “puppet of [its] own time” but rather looks to the future that the students themselves are to manifest (pg. 43). Here lies the challenge for the teachers: to guide students based on a developing sense of what's burgeoning in the world, and not a stale reproduction of “how it really is.” Teachers must, of course, present facts and make clear the rules. But more importantly, through the teachers the students need to see their own destiny, their own mark on humanity. One example from the first Stuttgart school is when Steiner berates the faculty for banning smoking rather than engaging the students about the facts of the matter. He stressed that the purpose of the education is not to train students to follow rules or even to behave correctly but to call them to full awareness of their actions and to inspire insight.

These two purposes—that of the teacher and of the students—brought together create an education in which students educate themselves through the teachers. The content in classes hence becomes a vehicle not only to uncover some piece of knowledge from the past but to make a vital connection to the present—the present in which the students are karmically enmeshed. Teachers have to master their field of knowledge and also become masters at discerning the developing needs of their students.

Teachers need to stand firm in their passions and place in the world while also teetering on the razor's edge of unknowing. Most of all teachers need to develop the wisdom to leave room for the possibilities inherent in their students' questioning and becoming.

We at YIHS can learn a lot from Steiner's wisdom. Amidst the flurry of committees, programs, shows, and fundraisers, the teacher-student relationship is at the core of what we do. How are we as teachers allowing the interests and insights of the students to take root in the school? How are we continuing as teachers to be open to change and self-development? And together, students and teachers, what kind of world are we working to create?

The Gift of Wisdom

Please join us in cultivating wisdom, in honoring elder voices, and in growing a new generation while honoring our past and our future. Please consider making a financial contribution that will help keep our mission alive and thriving. Any amount is helpful and appreciated. There are two ways you can donate to Youth Initiative High School:

1. Send a check to:

5284

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Youth Initiative High School

500 E. Jefferson St.

FOR Viroqua, WI 54665

2. Go to www.yihs.net and click the donate button at the bottom of the page.

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LOCALLY ROASTED

Driftless Wisconsin



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