



## Spring Newsletter May 2016

# PLS young ones get outdoors with Forest School

The youngest group of Project Learn School students have been trying out a new curriculum concept this year: Forest School.

Forest School is a world-wide movement that gets students out of classrooms and into the woods. It incorporates math, science, ecology and literacy, with an overarching goal of nurturing teamwork, problem solving and self-reflection. Advocates of the Forest School movement say that being outdoors markedly improves students' ability to self-regulate emotionally and to learn, both in and out of the classroom.

An excerpt from a December 2015 blog entry provides a peek into how Project Learn has adapted this concept.

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December 23, 2015

Our last Forest School experience of 2015 also marked our first time in the Wissahickon Valley, or the "real wild," as some of the children put it.

We made our way from the drop-off location down to the creek. Upon arrival at base camp, some children got to work immediately building things in the sand, while others discovered that a giant boulder could also be a slide.

Several of children got the hang of skipping stones across the creek and watched as James' mom, Louise, found the perfect stone and managed somewhere near a dozen consecutive skips.

After a snack break, complete with hot tea, we headed up towards the woods for a hike. Just as we were getting started,



Top: Sylvie Merryman-Lotze explores tree rings during Forest School. Bottom: Dontrell Chisolm and Eric Thompson set off for an outdoor adventure!

two horses and their riders crossed our path and we had a chance to greet the massive creatures up close.

As we continued on, many of the children found walking sticks to carry or drag with them. After noticing the marks the sticks made on the trail it was discovered that if you spun around with the stick on the ground it made a perfect circle, much like a compass on paper.

Leaving behind several circles, we turned onto a smaller trail that led us up higher and away from the creek.

After an impromptu break for some rock climbing and

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*Forest School; Continued from page 1*

to look at some bugs, we continued on for about 1.5 miles in total, looping back around to base camp for lunch.

We concluded our day with a sharing circle, and after some last-second splashing at the water's edge, we headed back out of the valley to be picked up.

This first trip to the Wissahickon was also the first Forest School experience with genuine discomfort for some of the children. Getting through this discomfort took patience and trust in the adults as they modeled how to respond to being damp and cold while out in the woods, but by the end of the day, the children's willingness and fortitude led to smiles and insight as they reflected on their experiences. May there be many more such opportunities in the new year! 🏠



The child becomes, literally, the center of the lesson during Forest School!

Project Learn School is an independent cooperative school for students in grades K-8. Situated in the historic Philadelphia neighborhood of Mt. Airy, PLS maximizes the many resources available in a dynamic urban setting.

At Project Learn School, teachers, students and parents work together to create a progressive and humanistic community that promotes mutual respect, involvement and curiosity.

The Project Learn School Newsletter is an occasional newsletter published for alumni and friends of Project Learn School. To submit alumni news, please write to us at [alumni@projectlearnschool.org](mailto:alumni@projectlearnschool.org).

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Philadelphia, PA 19119  
215-438-3623  
[www.projectlearnschool.org](http://www.projectlearnschool.org)

## Congratulations to our eighth graders!



This year's eighth graders in Costa Rica: Evan Kerr, Mephki Lopez, Evan Spann, Ian Holbrook, Nya Hardin, Tia Yancey, Fae Lobron, Penelope Rhoads

We wish you all the best as you graduate from Project Learn School and join the ranks of alumni! This year's class is headed off to the following high schools:

- Nya Hardin** - Charter High School for Architecture & Design (CHAD)
- Ian Holbrook** - Central High School
- Evan Kerr** - Springfield High School
- Fae Lobron** - Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA)
- Mephki Lopez** – Undecided; either Woodlynde or Saul H.S.
- Penny Rhoads** – Philadelphia High School for Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA)
- Evan Spann** - Roman Catholic High School
- Tia Yancey** - Central High School



## Tess on the Trail

*By Tess Liebersohn, PLS alumni (1995-2000); sent in from the Trail.*

My first memory of camping features a huge vat of macaroni and cheese at the annual PL camping trip at Ricketts Glen State Park. It was the late 90s, and having that much access to mac and cheese was the highlight of my trip, even more than the swimming, games, and ghost stories told around the campfire.

Over 15 years later, mac and cheese is still an important part of my current lifestyle; I eat it at least three nights a week as I attempt a 5-month thru hike of the Appalachian Trail. As I write this, I am a little over 500 miles into a trek that will last 2189 miles from Georgia to Maine. I have a lot of boxes of mac and cheese in my future (and other dehydrated foods!).

I first encountered the AT in 2006 when I hiked 60 miles of the New Jersey portion the summer after my sophomore year at Central High School. It was a short trip, and I was intrigued by the thru-hikers who hiked for 15 hours a day and still had a strong zest for the woods. "Why not me?" I thought. I put "Hike the whole Appalachian Trail" on my bucket list and promptly forgot about it.

After attending the University of Pittsburgh and having adventures in France, California, and North Carolina, the Trail came calling again last year. My heart and mind yearned for



Tess Liebersohn near Bland, VA, the quarter-way point on the Appalachian Trail.

some time away from the crushes of "civilization," as it were, and a 5-month trek in the woods seemed like the perfect opportunity to learn about many things: nature, solitude, self-reliance, challenge, and all of the unknowns that would come up between Springer Mountain, GA, and Mount Katahdin, ME. It was also perfectly timed as my last adventure before starting graduate school in school counseling at the University of Pennsylvania in the fall.

"Why not me?" became "I'm doing it!" as I spent a year researching gear and training. On March 5, 2016, I started my hike.

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Left: Alfia White, Caeli Smith and Lauren Stander. Below: Caeli Smith on viola with the Juilliard Orchestra, Case Scaglione conducting.



## Alumni of (musical) note

PLS alumni Caeli Smith, co-principal viola of the Juilliard Orchestra, performed in the Penderecki Viola Concerto in October with Case Scaglione conducting.

Caeli holds a bachelor's degree in violin performance from The Juilliard School and is currently completing a master's degree in viola performance.

Two other PLS alumni, Alfia White and Lauren Stander, were in attendance. Lauren and Alfia now live in Brooklyn; Caeli lives in Manhattan.



**Blast from the Past! Project Learn's soccer team was undefeated in the 2000 year.** As Dan Goffe reported in the PL Paper that year, "Part of the winning season was due to excellent coaching by Roni Anton and Brian Girard. Walter King, Louie Ackelsberg, Evan Cantu-Hertzler and Daniel Goffe were four of the oldest students who also helped the team at practices and games."

Bottom row: Louie Acklesberg, Patrick Johnston, Joe Magdovitz, Roni Anton, Seth Lyons, Ben Babcock, Yoni Liebling, Walter King, Evan Tierney, Evan Tracy, Atoyia VanBeverhoudt, Evan Cantu-Hertzler, Graham Johnston, Zev Steinlauj, Jamison Anton. On the climber: Nile Norris-Jones, Noel Scales, Maya Ben-Yaacov, Sarah Dekker, Lucy Fox, Nick Dekker, Dan Goffe, Zack King, Nicola White, Ryan Kelly, Cabral Keita, David Guthrie, Ben Polson, Micah Winterstein, and Cris Anton. Also part of the team (but not in the photo): Brian Girard.



Check out our completely revamped website at [www.projectlearnschool.org](http://www.projectlearnschool.org)! Many thanks to the parents and staff whose time and talents brought about this transformation.

*Trail; Continued from page 3*

The first month, I faced ill-fitting shoes, lonely nights in shelters, and growing doubts about my ability to carry 35 pounds of gear, food and water, every day for 150 days. I averaged 10 miles and one blister per day. I couldn't believe how... hard it was to just put one foot in front of the other, over and over.

After two weeks off to refocus and let some minor foot tendonitis heal, my attitude toward the Trail improved dramatically. Since returning, I went up two shoe sizes and dozens of mountains. I drank (filtered) water from streams and springs in three different states. I can do a full resupply for four days' worth of food in 20 minutes for \$20. I motivate myself over 2000-foot changes in elevation with some choice phrases, and then high-five the nearest tree when it's over. I wake each morning happy to know that there will be new miles, landscapes, plants, pains, friends, and another sunset by the day's end, and that I can handle it all. I average 16 miles a day and shower once a week at hostels. I've lost those doubts, along with two toenails.

I am doing this hike alone and have been continually impressed by the kindness and generosity of other hikers and Trail community members. Limping into a shelter and encountering smiles and warm greetings from trail friends makes even the most strenuous 20-mile day feel like a walk in the woods. The only "weapon" I carry is a small knife, which I have only used once to cut cheese. I have not felt unsafe once. The only time I saw a bear, it was a little cub, running away from me.

I've heard that the Trail never actually gets easy. I'm not worried, however. The next time it gets tough, I'll look around at the trees, say a blessing of gratitude to my heroic feet, and take a step. Left, right, left, right...

Happy trails,

Tess Liebersohn

(trail name: Rocky, like Balboa)



# Thank you, donors!

## 45th Anniversary Celebrations

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the PLS 45th anniversary party on December 12 at the Manayunk Brewery. Special appreciation to Humbleman Band for providing entertainment, to Lisa Pack and her committee for planning the event, and to everyone who donated to our silent auction.

Alum **Greg Prestegord** donated a painting to the school in honor of our 45th anniversary. You can see his work at <http://gregoryprestegord.com/> The painting is on display at Project Learn and is for sale; please contact Roni if you are interested in purchasing this painting.

Our donor list is sometimes incomplete – but this is because of our broad base of supporters raising funds for PLS in a variety of ways. If you contributed to PLS this year and your name is not on this list, be sure to let us know so that we can properly appreciate your gift.

Thank you also to the many people who donate time, talents and love to PLS. We are grateful that you choose to engage in this work with us!

### Gifts were given in honor of:

- ☞ Dylan
- ☞ Shayma Dorsey Brooks
- ☞ Martha Hansen Fertman
- ☞ Jane Laties
- ☞ Lucy Miller
- ☞ Alexis Tanner
- ☞ Morris Waxman

### Gifts were given in memory of:

- ☞ Nancy Bailey
- ☞ Marc Barag
- ☞ Jose Filamore
- ☞ Gregory Johnson
- ☞ Irene Melnyk
- ☞ James Miller
- ☞ Lila Rudnick
- ☞ Paul Shane
- ☞ Dan Stroiman

### Institutional Donors:

- Central Philadelphia Quaker Meeting
- Chubb and Son
- GlaxoSmithKline

### Individual Donors:

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- Frank DuLuca
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Leah Thomas leaps across the Wissahickon during Forest School.

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# Staff News

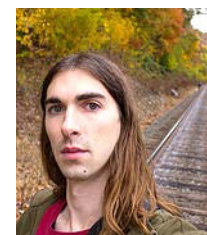
Project Learn School is sad to share that three teachers will leave the school this spring. Liam Gallagher, Sean Leber and Jason Alexander will depart for new challenges after this school year ends.

Liam is in his seventh year as the PLS science teacher. He also took on the Educational Coordinator responsibilities for the past two years. He is leaving to become the director of the IDEA Center (Innovation, Discovery, Engineering and Arts) at a private school near Kennett Square.

Sean joined PLS in the 2013-2014 school year. Sean teaches math for Junior High and Lisa's Group. After three years with PLS he has decided to pursue a career in website design and programming.

Jason also came to PLS in 2013-2014, offering his support to PLS on a volunteer basis. His official title for 2015-2016 was Teaching Fellow but in practice, Jason stepped in to meet needs as diverse as wiring the PA system; teaching a student-centered inquiry-based philosophy program; designing the school website; and teaching Math and English.

Students, parents and teaching colleagues will all miss these three gentle souls. We wish them well on their new adventures!



Pictured above: Teacher Liam Gallagher engaging with Marcus and Sergie. Middle: Sean Leber the Wookiee, helping students prepare for the Halloween festivities, shown with Shayla the "Minion." Bottom: Jason Alexander.

## Donors; Continued from page 6

Nava Szwegold  
Emily Hale-Sills  
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Joanne Shane Plummer  
Dominick & Rosemary Giordano  
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Melissa Klein & Neysa Nevins  
Joanne & John Kerr  
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Gerard & Catherine Schweiger

### Donors for 8th graders' Costa Rica trip:

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Anna Hermann  
Annette Gill

Anonymous  
Anthony & Lauren Puccia  
Aunt Mayleen  
Bridget Mitchell  
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John & Sarah

## We want to hear from you!

Share with us about what you and yours are up to! Write to us at [alumni@projectlearnschool.org](mailto:alumni@projectlearnschool.org); send photos, too! We will publish your news in the next issue of the PLS newsletter. 🏠

John Day  
Judy Leatherman  
Kevin Birley  
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The Days  
Tresa & Avi  
Uncle Ed & Aunt Karen  
Vincent Gallagher  
Wayne & Kathy Arsenault  
Wendy Romig

Join Project Learn's Alumni/Alumni Parent Committee! Committee members guide, develop, and support alumni activities and encourage fellow alumni to participate. All persons are welcome, regardless of whether you were with the school one year or many! To get involved, email [alumni@projectlearnschool.org](mailto:alumni@projectlearnschool.org) and be sure to join our Facebook Group – the link can found on the Alumni tab of our website, [www.projectlearnschool.org](http://www.projectlearnschool.org).



## Why we give to Project Learn

By Melissa Klein and Neysa Nevins

Our son Tani is finishing third grade Project Learn School and looks forward to going to school each day. We appreciate the way Project Learn supports the development of his courage, creativity, and values, along with the more traditional subjects. We are blessed with extra funds to donate, and we have decided to make Project Learn a priority for our giving because we value this kind of education and want to support the ability for families with less means to send their children to Project Learn. Supporting Project Learn is an investment in our present and our future. Please consider joining us in supporting Project Learn, at whatever level you are able. Each dollar makes a difference in this small school with a budget of under \$1 million, funded primarily by tuition dollars. We are grateful to all the families who have given of their time and money through the past 45 years to sustain Project Learn.



Melissa serves as development chair. Please give her a call if you would like to discuss making a gift to the school (215-510-2172).

Please join Melissa and Neysa in saying:

**Yes!** *I will help keep curiosity thriving at Project Learn School!*

- ☐ Donate online at [www.projectlearnschool.org](http://www.projectlearnschool.org). Click the "Support Us" tab.
- ☐ Volunteer! Project Learn needs your talents, too! Contact Roni Anton at [info@projectlearnschool.org](mailto:info@projectlearnschool.org) to inquire about volunteering.
- ☐ Clip this out and mail it with a check to us at:  
Project Learn School  
6525 Germantown Ave  
Philadelphia PA 19118
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- ☐ Call Melissa at 215-510-2172 about giving through Pennsylvania's tax credit programs for businesses, or through stocks, securities, or your estate.
- ☐ Ask your employer to match your gift. Company name: \_\_\_\_\_

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- ☐ Alumni ☐ Friend
- ☐ Grandparent of student or alumni

Please use my gift for:

- ☐ Tuition assistance ☐ PLS's most pressing need
- ☐ Arts ☐ Science
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

May 2016





## You are invited to the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual alumni reunion picnic!

June 18, 2016  
4:00 to 7:00 PM  
at Project Learn School

All alumni, parent-alumni  
and current families are  
welcome! Kids' activities,  
food & non-alcoholic drinks  
provided; adults may BYOB.

Suggested donation: \$20/adult



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