

## Deepening Roots After the Storm

— Rachel Solt, Orien Mann, Angela Richardson, and Mira Kier

*In September, 2013, devastating floods hit Boulder, Colorado. Boulder Waldorf Kindergarten, located on a beautiful two-acre biodynamic farm, was inundated by a four-foot wall of muddy water that destroyed everything in its path. A temporary location was found at a nearby synagogue and classes continued to be held while the work of restoration proceeded. Donations from far and wide, as well as an outpouring of generosity and kindness, helped to sustain the faculty and parents through a difficult time. The following reflections give insight into how the community was actually strengthened through what seemed at first a disastrous experience.*

Each devastating experience we have in life has the potential to rob us of all that we know and force us to strip away our layers, get down to the core of who we are, identify what we stand for, and stand face-to-face with our limiting beliefs.

In the darkness of the devastating flood that destroyed our school, we were called upon to rebuild not only our school, but ourselves, from the inside out. Moments like this are often referred to as the dark night of the soul—but if you take the opportunity, these times can be a powerful catalyst for transformation. That is, if you allow yourself to receive the life lessons and divine wisdom that are attempting to come through.

At Boulder Waldorf Kindergarten, we struggled to understand the enormity of what had happened that day in September. Our beloved school was devastated; essentially, a river was

running through it. Yet without hesitation, we were “all equal, all equally committed” to persevering—to finding a temporary space to receive the children. We offered them the chance to come to school, to be



held in love, and be provided the gift of a rhythmic day amidst the chaos that was occurring in our community. We did what we needed to and fell back into the arms of individuals, schools, businesses, friends and family all around the world who came to our aid. Initially we were in survival mode, but in time, some very profound messages began to reveal themselves. It is our wish to share with you what we have learned.

Rudolf Steiner spoke often about the importance of maintaining the “healthy social life” of a community. This is, indeed, a core value in any Waldorf school. We recite verses about it and hold it as an indelible truth. At BWK, when we found ourselves raw, vulnerable, and outside of our comfort zone, this principle took on a deeper meaning. We made it a priority to reevaluate how we implement this principle in our work, our relationships, and our community. It came down to this: camaraderie, trust, connection, communication, letting go of individual agendas, and release of egotistical thinking were vital to our being able to create and sustain a temporary school during the flood. We found ourselves having to become one organism working for the same goal—and it was not without challenge. We no longer enjoyed the autonomy of individual classrooms, we shared snack times in a large community room, combined classes at the nearby park, mixed classes at story time, and had to be flexible enough to shift at a moment’s notice.

Without the form and rhythm we were used

to, we relied on each other to help hold the groups of children whether through discipline, putting on boots in the cubby room, or escorting children to the bathroom. This is not what the typical Waldorf kindergarten favors, but for us it was necessary for survival. As a result, our parent body saw our dedication and strength and trusted us implicitly. They valiantly stayed open to and accepting of our efforts and exhibited incredible patience with the process. This mirrored back to us and gave us the strength to stay in the moment. We truly were one organism working toward the same goal.

Surprisingly, what we found when we returned to our school, and our own classrooms, was that we missed each other! We felt we had actually become “aunties” to each other’s classes, and more than just supporters to one another—stalwart partners in our work. Additionally, we found we had created extraordinarily strong connections with our parent body. A group cannot endure such a shared experience without deep bonds being made. There had been a shift, an internal attitude shift inside all of us. It manifested in the way we love and care for our school, our work, our children and each other. Suddenly we were more like a family and less like an “organization.” We were arriving each day, not to a job, but to perform our life’s work. That renewed dedication deepened our resolve to reevaluate what Waldorf education means to us, how it is asking to evolve, and how we can meet the children in our community in the highest truth.

BWK is a unique Waldorf school in that we are exclusively an early childhood center. It is owner-run, there are no grades, no boards, no committees, no college of teachers and our administration consists of one very busy, stouthearted champion! Since the school’s inception, our fearless leader Seana has been at the helm of BWK, creating, evolving and supporting her mission to Preserve the Kingdom of Childhood. During



the flood, however, with her home and school in ruins, her family displaced, and a maelstrom of details to manage, Seana had to fully put her faith in her faculty and staff for the actual running of the school. In the process, and perhaps to her surprise, we realized as a faculty that we wanted to take more proactive ongoing responsibility for the overall management of the school. This led to the introduction of new assigned positions for lead teachers in the areas of Pedagogy, Festival and Event Planning, and overseeing of farm and grounds. Lead teachers now have involvement in the hiring process and work together on enrollment. We provide peer-mentoring to one another and parent mediation when necessary. And this is just the beginning. The result is the empowerment of teachers and an overall sense of unity that positively affects our larger community. Support is at hand for all aspects of the school, and communication is flourishing.

Since our reopening last January, we have continued to nurture our connection with one another. We start our days with a reading from the Calendar of the Soul, a morning verse, a song, and a check in together. Lead teachers have an extra weekly collaboration meeting where we share stories, circles and issues coming up in our classes. We attend each other's lantern walks and spiral gardens to support one another and hold sacred space. We bounce ideas off one another and talk about difficult situations openly and honestly. We share when we are feeling disconnected or unsupported and quickly remedy the situation. In our weekly meeting with full faculty and staff, we dedicate the first fifteen minutes to a "Check In" during which we take turns sharing what is living for us, inside or outside of school; we might partner up and have a question and answer session to reveal burning questions we might have of one another; at one particular session, we listened while a colleague talked about a difficult interaction she had had that morning with a parent. At the end of each month we enjoy a night out together where we celebrate those who had birthdays



*Admiring new slippers donated by the Brooklyn Waldorf School*

that month and just unwind in the spirit of friendship.

The personal inner work it takes to be able to connect at this level cannot be overemphasized. Yet personal practice has become a top priority for everyone at BWK—from our owners to our administrator to the teachers, assistants

and helpers. Through patience, presence, and trust, the willingness to sit down with one another with transparency, honesty and openness, we "completely extinguish ourselves." We become the eye of the storm in a society that does not necessarily support our values and principles, and hold the anchor for parents in that stormy sea. We stress the importance of simplicity, rhythm, and less stimulation. We take care of ourselves and each other, setting boundaries and standing in truth. This commitment to our inner work allows us to receive the children openly and in turn receive inspiration and divine guidance to support us in our work.

Today, we can look back at the flood and see the gifts it gave us. We were torn open, but that tear allowed light to shine through—shining light on our dark places, helping us see a new path, and revealing new inspirations for the work we do as Waldorf early childhood teachers. Like the rain, sometimes it takes falling for us to receive a greater message, to test our resolve, to challenge us to look deeply within ourselves and live in the beautiful raw truth of who we are at the core. All equal, all equally committed. This was the gift given to us at Boulder Waldorf Kindergarten following the devastating flood of 2013: a renewed dedication and commitment to our school, our families, Waldorf philosophy and, especially, each other.

There truly are not deep enough words to express our gratitude to everyone who assisted us in saving our school. We are inspired by your generosity every day and dedicate our work to you. ♦

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