

# Hawthorne Family Playschool



Winter 2008, Volume 4, Issue 2

## Deepening Our Relationships with Other Animals

By Teacher Susan Eisman



One thing I love about young children is their connection to non-human animals. I believe we have much to learn from children's appreciation of

animals. Animals are an integrated part of kids' daily experience. Children's imaginary play scripts are frequently populated by animals. Their games, both small and gross motor, commonly include animals. Children's closest comforts and confidants are often stuffed animal friends; they are completely engrossed when they encounter even the smallest of creatures—ladybug, earth worm, slug. They delight in picture books and songs in which animals are the primary characters. Fittingly, stuffed animals Whoey the owl (M/W) and Seaweed the sea otter (T/Th) have quickly become beloved members of our classroom. I admire children's receptivity, intrigue and respect for animals. And I am eager to help nurture this orientation of intrigue and respect.

My knowledge of children's connection to animals and my desire to have a nature-rich classroom led me to consider bringing some creatures to our room. I'd had serious reservations in the past about getting "pets." I was primarily concerned about the restricted range of movement, fearing the creature's natural range of motion would be too limited in captivity. Similarly I worried that we wouldn't be able to offer anywhere near the range of plant life the creature typically enjoyed.

For some reason—possibly the typical justification for having pets in the classroom as an educational tool—I was willing to put aside my concern that the habitats we could offer would be significantly inferior to what is naturally occurring. And I added goldfish and walking sticks to our room last year.

I have had mixed feelings about having class pets ever since they've joined us. I worry that the magic of the creatures is compromised as they live in contained spaces devoid of interesting habitats. (Continued on Page 4)

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## Raising Conscious Warriors

By Cara Lee Bauer (Zane)

There has been a lot of discussion about healthy power play at school and I am passionate about providing this opportunity for our children. I am

especially interested in power play because I work with adults who have become disconnected from their power and teach them to reconnect to their warrior side. The prospect of raising kids with their internal warriors in tact is really exciting to me. In sharing some of my thoughts and experiences, I hope the discussion will continue.

Healthy power play allows kids to explore and develop their warrior qualities within safe boundaries. Even though it feels challenging to me at times, these are qualities that I want Zane to have as an adult. Conscious warriors are connected to their own sense of power and take ownership of it. They are connected with their passion for life and have the courage to stand out and be themselves. They know their wants and needs, set appropriate boundaries, and defend themselves and others when necessary. They have a strong sense of justice. Conscious warriors are wise with their power and choose to express it authentically. They do not seek violence but use it as a last resort.

Like many kids, when Zane was a toddler he started making guns out of household objects and shooting at everything. I was uncomfortable with that type of play at first, but I could not deny that guns and weapons exist. It seemed like this was an innate trait and it would take a huge amount of energy to subvert it. Matt and I started discussing appropriate rules for weapon play. Our intention is to teach Zane that weapons come with rules and that different places may have different rules.

Zane also went through a period of fascination with kitchen knives where every day he would ask to look in the sharp knife drawer. After my initial resistance, we defined rules for looking at the knives. I regularly showed him the knives and how to hold them and handle them. He wanted to know what each one was used for and when he would be able to use them by himself. Zane, like many boys and girls, has a very strong warrior side. It feels like we are constantly trying to find a balance between giving him the space to express his power and setting limits for him. It takes a lot of time and energy and I think each family can choose their own boundaries. I am finding that to accept the warrior side of Zane, I need to more deeply accept that part of myself.

One of the tools I use in teaching adults to reconnect with their warrior side is a sword. Some people really light up when they hold the sword and connect with it. Weapons are an external symbol of internal power and can be used as tools to connect more deeply with that power. I think kids are drawn to weapons because they feel powerful and when weapons are taboo they can become disproportionately powerful. Everyone has the capability to hurt someone, with or without weapons, as well as the capability to love. Conscious warriors take full ownership of their ability to hurt and therefore can truly choose love and peace.

We have the opportunity to raise the next generation of powerful women and men who can consciously choose to destroy or create. Conscious warriors will be needed to go against the status quo and make the radical changes necessary for peace and sustainability on this planet. I believe that our investment in healthy power play today will pay off for our kids and for generations to come.

# The Worst Parent Helper

By Belinda Miller (Georgia)

I approach parent helper days with something a little stronger than panic. If I'm snack parent I'm certain I will send Will into anaphylactic shock or surely disappoint sweet, agreeable Gavin. But even when I am second parent I worry. Can I be cheerful? Can I be patient? Can I get through the day pretending I'm social and not the agoraphobic that I am? Getting to school on time is an issue on regular days; on parent helper days it's just one more thing to make me feel like I will fail. I will be a terrible person. I will ruin HFP's wonderful vibe. I'll wreck a kid for life.

When I arrive at the classroom, I'm more worried still. I don't have a clear vision of how I can be a calm and peaceful parent, and I am usually sleep deprived to boot. Teacher Susan busily gets me started with some tasks, gets me thinking about the day, and activities that will get the kids engaged. I'm always thinking, "I can't do that. The kids will hate me. I have nothing to offer here."

And then the day begins. Somehow I end up in the dramatic play area, even though I think that's where I least want to be. I watch, and jump into the play when asked. And they do ask me, they want to play with me! I'm fascinated as the kids move in and out of each other's circles, how the play eases into the other games like soap bubbles floating in the air and bouncing against each other. Often that leads to someone being upset, their bubble pops, but sometimes that leads to something quite magical. The bubbles gently stick together, forming one larger bubble, distinct but part of the whole. A game of trick-or-treat-babies melds with the robber dog game, and the wolf-children somehow make it

work too. Everyone wants the stones that are today's hot commodity. There are enough to go around, but the fun is in the tricking, or the stealing, or the giving. It works and it works and it works, and I am a robber, a wolf owner, a candy giver, and even a defeated T-Rex.

At some point the bubble breaks. An abrupt turn—no one knows quite what happened—but the game has become too rough, uncomfortable, unhappy. Teacher Susan calls a meeting, everyone gathers around, some are already

thinking ahead. How did everything devolve, and can this game move forward in a way to make everyone happy, or do all the games just end? There's some action trying to restart things, maybe wrap up a loose doggy story, feed a hungry otter pup, but it's clearly time to move on. Teacher Susan magically makes an easy transition, inviting some children to the fish story writing area, switching parent helpers to

different positions, changing the energy and the flow, and quieting things down as we head into clean up and circle time. I know there's no recapturing that enchanted triple bubble moment but I'm sad to see the game end. I look at these kids, in all their earnest, dear, imaginative, pure play and wonder if next time I am called to parent I'll feel less panicked incompetence. Probably not, I've got a lifetime of neurosis at work, but working with Susan and these kids has helped me jump into the moment and appreciate the sweet, fragile connections that can be made, and broken in an instant. Every time I parent help I learn something new, and I learn that I am willing to listen and explore, and love people, and especially these kids.



Belinda, Hova and Georgia

# Deepening Our Relationship With Other Animals

Continued from Page 1

I've been concerned that if the creatures' experience is compromised then our sense of those creatures becomes tainted as well. If we can readily accept a limited experience of the creature, what diminished notion are we learning about the creature itself? I keep asking myself: Is this fair to the animals? Am I inadvertently teaching children to think less of animals by housing them in bowls and cages? What about the role of animal as role model, teacher or friend? It seems unlikely that an animal could serve this larger function pent up in a box.

As I reflect back to when the pets were first introduced into the classroom, I recall that kids were interested, monitoring the animals' activity and talking much about them. But since then, their fascination has waned. While kids seem to appreciate taking on the special task of feeding the goldfish and spraying the walking sticks, it's not clear that they are significantly invested in the creatures themselves. One parent recently questioned: "Do kids even notice them?"

When Goldie (the third fish) died last year, we had an opportunity to talk about life and death. We made observations of Goldie's body and we shared our experiences and ideas about death, based on wildlife and pets that we'd known that had died. A couple of kids related the experience to grandparents that had passed on. Having a pet allowed us to consider life cycle issues and respond in thoughtful ways.

Ironically, and then not surprisingly, I have found that moving the fish bowl to the writing center to engage in critical conversations about the fish--considering the quality of the fish environment--has brought the very dispositions I would hope to foster: respect, intrigue, curiosity, reverence. As I invite children to share their ideas about the fish in words and pictures, kids are deeply

engaged and present, closely observing with curiosity and enthusiasm. The quality of their drawings takes on a new dimension as they slow down and engage with real live fish.

Adi narrates as she draws: "I'm looking at the fish 'cause they go" (opens and closes her mouth and draws an open circle). "And I see white stuff on the bottom so that's what I'm doing." Adi adds white specks to the bottom of the page. "They're wagging their tail."

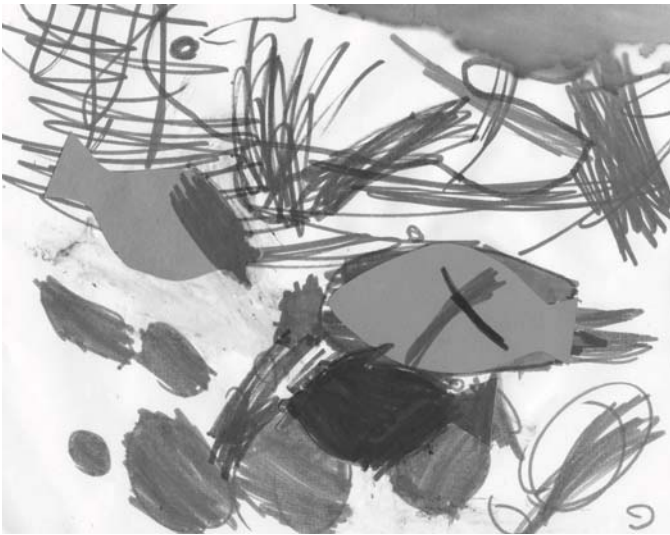
Tabor notes "It looks like they're playing tag" as the two fish swim in circles around the bowl. Tabor relates this simplified version of fish to a rich ocean environment, drawing: "This fish lives deep in the ocean where the sharks are."

Gavin observes the fish and tells me, "The fish knocked into each other. When I drew it I saw what it looked like and drew it." This wasn't the first time a child noted the crowded fish environment. And I felt uneasy that I was allowing the fish to live in such small container.

My discomfort prompted me to lead some classroom conversations with kids, encouraging them to contemplate our class "pets" experience. After some close observation and dialog, two main comments struck me: Theo concluded that it's "kinda mean" to keep fish in a bowl and Adi shared (with Torie corroborating) that it's "kinda boring" for fish to live in a bowl. So at least some of the older and more vocal children in our class experience the fish in a bowl as cruel treatment. And clearly I have no interest in teaching that it is acceptable to treat any creatures unkindly.

In a recent art class I taught, I invited students (K- 2<sup>nd</sup> grade) to select a wildlife photo from a spectacular glossy-page book celebrating animals in their natural habitats. I encouraged each child to include this photo in their painting.





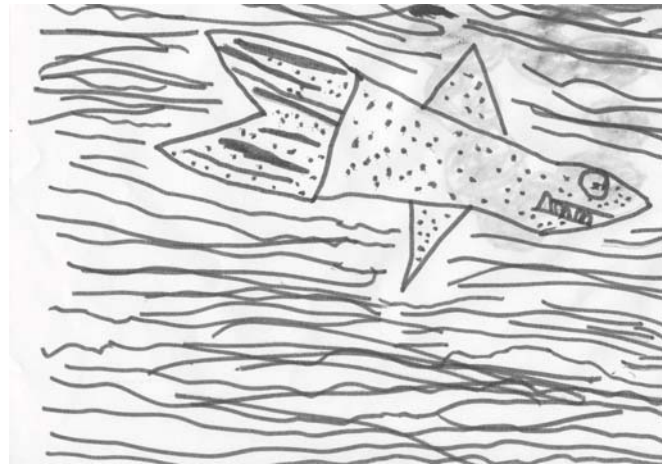
They're wagging their tail. They're in red water - Adi



This fish lives deep in the ocean where the sharks are - Tabor



The fish knocked into each other. When I draw it I saw what it looked like and drew it. My new fish is called Rainy. It's a gold fish. This is the water on the bottom. - Gavin



Will's fish



Raina's fish



Mama fish (top), stones (middle), rainbow fish (bottom) - Clara

Knowing children's deep appreciation for animals, I expected kids would be eager to respond to a wildlife photo of their choosing. I was curious to see how the chosen creature might speak to each child and how that child might in turn respond with paint.

Children enthusiastically approached the project, taking great care to pick the most appealing portrait. Some photos were close-ups with the suggestion of the creature's natural environment, while others included a broad scope of the savannah, jungle, hillside, etc. in which the animal lives. Some children looked intently at the portrait and extended the natural environment echoing the trees, shrubbery and surroundings present in the photo, painting more of the same on the adjacent page. Others represented their own version of the creature, painting the animal shape side by side with the photographed creature. It seemed as though the subjects—magical creatures with vast capabilities and physical features so different from our human ones—demanded the artists' full attention. I found it invigorating to witness the process of each child communing with a creature in the wild- even if only on paper.

I made observations and asked questions, nudging children to capture the essence of each creature. One child chose a cheetah. She outlined the cheetah shape in yellow and beautifully captured its spots with black blotches throughout its body. Her cheetah rested on a tree branch, just as the cheetah in the photo lounged. The child then startled me as she painted vertical black lines over her freshly painted cheetah. While the photo represented the cheetah in the wild, relaxed and a part of the tree it reclined in, this child's exposure to a cheetah was in a zoo, so she methodically painted bars across the cheetah's body caging it in. Note: A caged cheetah will never express its greatest splendor as the fastest land animal. In my years of teaching, I haven't been able to rationalize having caged animals. And it turns out, I still can't. I feel arrogant to consider

limiting these creatures' experiences. And I am challenged to seriously consider my role as teacher regarding further shaping our children's ideas about right relationships with non-human animals. While I have been deeply thoughtful about nurturing peer relationships in the classroom, I clearly have more processing to do regarding our relationships with animals.

Thanks to those of you who engaged with my disequilibrium concerning hosting pets in the classroom. Thank you for sharing your thinking with me. It is heartening to work side-by-side such thoughtful and engaged families. Taking time to wrestle internally and think and share with you and your children has helped me to clarify my own underlying values to date:

*1. I consider all living creatures to be valuable in their own right, deserving to live and thrive in complex habitats consistent with those they experience in the natural world.*

*2. I hope to help children deepen their appreciation for animals and the web of life. I expect as children deepen relationships with animals, they'll later be more likely to advocate for the preservation and protection of animals and animal habitats, non-human and human alike.*

So I will share my thinking with the children and we will soon find alternative homes for the gold fish and walking sticks. As we work toward embellishing and "greening" our outdoor play area, I expect we will attract more critters to observe and learn from in their natural habitats. These insects, birds, squirrels and such, can thrive outdoors- free to move and exist in a rich and varied environment. And I am happy to consider additional ways we may thoughtfully gain exposure to other animals, including the possibility of inviting family pets to visit for special class sessions.

Respectfully, Susan

# Conversations with Children About Classroom Pets

By Teacher Susan Eisman

*I invite children to consider the experience and quality of life of the animals: These fish live together in this bowl. They always have each other. And they have all the food they need because we feed them every day. But they can never leave this bowl. Their bowl is like their house. What would it be like if you lived with your family in your house and you could play with them and you had all the food you needed but you could never leave your house?*

I begin a conversation with Caden, Theo and Gus in the loft. I ask them to notice the fish across the room.

Theo: with open lid so they climb around.

Caden: But the fish can't even climb.

Susan: If you were a fish...

Theo: you couldn't climb.

Theo: I'm trying to get out. (Swims on back, flapping his arms).

Theo: I fell off the side of the glass. (Flops down).

Caden: Me too. (Flops over).

Theo: I died. I come back alive again. (Brief pause).

Theo: Can we catch a sea otter and use it as a pet in the classroom?

Gus chimes in: A real one. I'm not joking.

Theo: I have snorkel gear at home.

Susan: Do you think a sea otter would be satisfied in a space we could offer at school?

Theo: Or we could keep it in a swimming pool with its whole family.

Susan: What would it be like if you couldn't leave your house?

Theo: I don't know.

Susan: The food you would need would be there and your family would be there.

Theo: What if we would have to move the school closer to the beach so we could get food for the sea otter.

Gus: How could we move the school?

Theo: With a truck.

Caden: With a moving van. We're not kidding.

Theo: And kill octopuses.

Susan: What's the part about killing octopuses about?

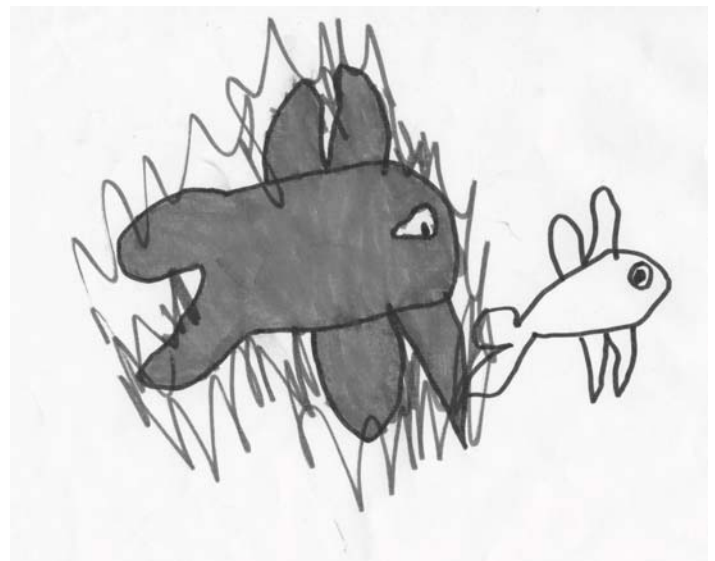
Theo: Sea otters like to eat little baby octopuses and stuff.

Caden: I really don't think we could move a house. We'd have to get a big gigantic excavator.

Theo: Or a giant robot with a gun on its head.

Susan: The fish live in that bowl. It's their house. But the fish never leave the bowl. What do you think it's like to be a fish in that bowl?

Theo: **Kinda mean.** (Jumps off loft).



Another day. Another conversation. A funny misunderstanding. I repeat the same framing. *These fish live together in this bowl. They always have each other. And they have all the food they need because we feed them every day. But they can never leave this bowl.*

Susan: Is it fair to the fish?

Zola: I think that wasn't really fair to the fishies.

Gavin: Me too.

Zola: 'Cause fishies want to be in the ocean.

They don't want to be in a bowl.

Gavin: In a mansion.

Zola: I would be happy for the fish in a big tank, but not in a little bowl.

Gavin: I'm a little boy and I'm happy.

I offer a big smile and clarify for Gavin: Zola said little bowl, not little boy. And, I am glad you are happy.

Next conversation.

Susan: What do you think it's like to be a fish in this bowl?

Torie: I don't know.

Adi: Just be swimming and playing tag and stuff like that. **Kinda boring.**

Torie: Yeah. Yeah.

Susan: What would make it less boring and more fun?

Adi: If there was more room they lived outside and they could play and stuff like that.

Torie: Yeah.

Susan: That's why I've been concerned 'cause this bowl is kind of small.

Adi narrates as she draws her fish picture.

Torie: If they live in the water outside.

Adi chimes in: Like a stream. But in a stream it's kinda dangerous 'cause there's sharks that could eat them.

Susan: Shares something about the difference between fresh water (streams and rivers) and salt water (ocean), relaying that sharks are only in the latter.

Torie: Not in a river.

Susan: There would be no sharks in a stream.

Torie remembers that Goldie died last year. She draws a picture that includes, Goldie, Spotty and Big Fish. I'm grateful to Torie for personalizing this, using the names of the fish we so rarely use.

Susan: What would be fair to our fish, to Spotty and Big Fish?



Goldie, Big Fish and Spotty by Torie

**Adi: 'Cause there's not much room. All they can do is swim around that's kinda boring if you're a kid- a fish.**

**Torie: Yeah. It is boring.**

**Susan: What should we do 'cause we don't want our fish to be bored?**

**Adi: Yeah we want them to be happy.**

Susan: We could find a different, bigger home for them.

Adi: Then we would miss them.

Torie: Yeah. Then we'd miss no more fish.

Susan: What would be another choice so we won't have to miss them?

Adi: We could put some desks in there- little desks out of wood and they could play school.

Torie: Yeah.



## Excerpts from “Thought To Exist In the Wild”

By Derrick Jensen

Published in *The Sun*, November 2007

“What do we really learn from zoos? We learn that we are here, and animals are there. We learn that our world is limitless, and their worlds are limited, constrained.”

“We learn that ‘habitat is not unspoiled forests and plains and deserts and rivers and mountains and seas, but concrete cages with concrete rocks and trunks of dead trees.”

“We learn that you can remove a creature from her habitat and still have a creature. We see a sea lion in a concrete pool and believe that we’re still seeing a sea lion. But we are not. . . . A sea lion *is* her habitat. She is the school of fish she chases. The water. She is the cold wind blowing over the ocean. She is the waves that strike the rocks on which she sleeps, and she is the rocks. She is the constant calling back and forth between members of her family, this talking to each other that never seems to stop. She is the shark who eventually ends her life. She is all of these things. She is the web. She is her desires, which we can learn only by letting her show us, if she wants; not by caging her.”

“Zoos teach us implicitly that animals . . . are our dependents; not our teachers, our neighbors, our betters, our equals, our friends, our gods.”

“Here is the real lesson taught by zoos . . . that a vast gulf separates humans and all other animals. We are here. They are there. We are special. We are separate.”

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This article can be read in its entirety at  
[http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/383/  
thought\\_to\\_exist\\_in\\_the\\_wild?page=1](http://www.thesunmagazine.org/issues/383/thought_to_exist_in_the_wild?page=1)

Note: HFP Parent Hova (Georgia) shared some thoughts regarding the Oregon Zoo’s focus on backyard habitats with their “Habitat Begins at Home” program among others. Check out the next newsletter for Hova’s article on backyard habitats.



Engaging with animals in a caged environment: Raina and Zoe spray the walking sticks



Engaging with animals through puppets, play and habitat study: Raina and Zola play with Whoey and a bird’s nest

# A Message From the President

## On generosity...

I am constantly amazed at the amount of generosity in our small community! In December alone, we raised over \$400 in cash and gift cards, as well as clothing, books and toys that we sent to a much deserving family. And even more inspiring is that we were able to hand Teacher Susan a card filled with \$1020! Thanks to Sue Lyon Myrick and Karin McTeague for the idea and the organizing and thanks to everyone who donated and made this amazing gift possible! Honestly, I was hoping that we would reach \$500, and to go over \$1000 really blew me away.

Even more impressive to me personally is the amount of time that everyone donates. Time in the classroom, time at meetings, time at fundraisers, time to paint, time at fairs, the list goes on and on. So, a heartfelt thank you to all of you for investing yourselves in HFP! We couldn't do it without your commitment!

Rachel



Janet (Porter) watching forest animal play



Christy (Gavin) stirs the magic pot



Jenny (Raina) helps at circle time



Aurora (Zola) and Susan (Will) at the membership meeting

# THANK YOU!

Parents are AMAZING! Thanks to everyone for all the vibrant energy that makes HFP thrive:

- Thanks to our whole community for your generosity and giving spirit during the holidays. We collected almost \$400 in gift cards and cash and some lovely clothes, toys, books, and other items for our adopted family in need. Blessings Abound!
- Thanks to Matt (Zane B.) for stripping the paint from our shelving. See the natural wood!
- Thank you to Wendy (Sam) for carefully and thoughtfully attending to the walking sticks and fish over the past months.
- Thanks to Aurora and Bones and all the other parents who collected donations for the auction and worked tirelessly to make this a great event.
- Jenny Masaoy, Don Masaoy, Rachel Petke, Jill Bryant, Kent Dolan, Karin McTeague, Jennifer Freda-Cowie, Kerasun Orsag, and Belinda Miller for all the prep work and painting of the classroom.
- Shannon Yentzer for all the flyers and postcards.
- Jen and Todd McIlhenny, Kirsten Wright and Thom Kasten for replenishing our play yard with woodchips.
- And of course, Susan Eisman, for being THE BEST!

## Bev Bos presents at PCPO Annual Conference Sunday, March 9th

Internationally recognized leader in early childhood education Bev Bos presents **“Celebrating Childhood: Have We Tumbled Over the Edge”** This seminar will focus on how we must learn to recognize and celebrate the idiosyncrasies and stages of growth of children, and establish environments that respect childhood. The seminar takes place at Oaks Park Historic Dance Pavilion with registration from 12-1, seminar from 1-2:30, and vendors from 2:30-3. Registration information and more details about the seminar are available at [http://lefh.net/pcpo/html/2008\\_conference.html](http://lefh.net/pcpo/html/2008_conference.html). Please also feel free to contact HFP Secretary and PCPO representative Karin McTeague at 503-234-3561 for more information. Some financial assistance and scholarships may be available.

Children's Birthdays  
February to April

Gus, February 15

Raina, February 24

Zane B., February 24

Zoe, March 7

Zola, March 14

Tabor, March 17

## Current Board Members

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### Teacher

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## School Calendar

### FEBRUARY

4 Board Meeting 6:30-8:30  
8 Friday class field trip to Tears of Joy  
10 Sledding Social  
18 No School, President's Day  
23 Open House 10:00-1:00

### MARCH

3 Board Meeting 6:30-8:30  
9 PCPO Seminar 1-2:30  
15 Membership Meeting 9:30-12:00  
24-28 Spring Break, No School

### APRIL

7 Board Meeting 6:30-8:30  
11 No School, Teacher In-Service  
19 Member meeting/work party 9:30-12:00  
TBA M/W and T/TH field trips to Tears of Joy

## Deepening Our Relationship with Food

At the January membership meeting, Teacher Susan discussed ways to make snack time more of a place for exploring our relationship to food. Her suggestions included baking in class, involving kids in snack preparation, and using a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

A wonderful web site for thinking more deeply about kids and food is The Edible Schoolyard ([www.edibleschoolyard.org](http://www.edibleschoolyard.org)). Although the project is aimed primarily at K-12 curriculum, many of the ideas and recipes would work wonderfully in our classroom.



*The day is coming when a single carrot, freshly observed, will set off a revolution - Paul Cezanne*