

Carrying the Meadows Tradition

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There is a belief among many that when you send good into the world in thought, word, or deed, it eventually returns to you. In that sense, High Meadows is currently reaping the rewards of former students who have circled back to give to our children the sense of respect and community that inspired them to be the gifted teachers they today.

Two of these teachers, Annie Kimball and Sarah Pluschau, came home to High Meadows last winter. Annie teaches preschool and drama, and Sarah teaches kindergarten. Both were kind enough to chat with me, a new parent at High Meadows, and share their personal experiences with the school as students, and why they chose to come back to teach.

The High Meadows approach to learning is fairly unique – tell me, as a former student, what makes it work so well?

Annie: Everything that you learn in a book at High Meadows, you get to apply in real life. You see roots grow in the garden, and photosynthesis when your flower blooms after taking care of it from a seed. It's applying learning to real life. As a student, I learned so much more from a hands-on experience than from reading it straight out of a book. You just get it.

Sarah: I think the program here works well in large part because of the respect that the teachers give to students – respecting kids' ideas makes them excited about what they are learning and it makes them want to come to school. When I was here, they did a "living museum" in which the kids were each given a topic, and we were able to go where we wanted to with it. I dressed up as someone from the Underground Railroad. The whole school got to see what I had learned, and I got to choose what direction I went in.

What has changed about the school since you were a student, and how do you feel about being a part of those changes now?

Sarah: Since I've come back as a teacher, the school feels more planned. And then there's been a lot of building since I left. When I was here for middle years, our classroom was in the Crawford Cabin. It was neat – it was small and the students were very close.

Sometimes it's hard for me to see changes. When they talk about a new building, I know it's a good thing, we need it, but it's still – very personal and close to my heart. Where the middle years building is now used to be the basketball court. When they built that building, a bunch of us came back and took pieces of the basketball court... you know, the basketball court was where we ate lunch every day, where we used to hang out. It's kind of like the feeling of when you move away to college and your parents do something different with your room.

Annie: The only difference for me, really, is the number of people on campus. It hasn't changed the character or charm that High Meadows is. High Meadows is such a great community because everybody knows the kids, the parents, the grandparents... it's safe and comfortable and a whole different level of respect that you're taught compared to other places.

Do you think your experience here as a student influenced your decision to teach?

Annie: Definitely. Because we were in multi-age classes, we did a lot of projects with kids of varying ages, and it taught us how to communicate with people at different age levels. Because of that, I always felt comfortable around any age kid, and around adults for that matter. I always felt comfortable sharing knowledge in whatever group I was in. I knew I was going to be a teacher.

Sarah and I started teaching here a month apart from each other. And it was so great to be welcomed back together. We remembered each other from school, and I had pictures of her that I found that we shared. We talked about coming back a lot – how it's the best place in the whole world to work, and we knew that because we had both worked at other places. It feels like home.

Sarah: I left here and said that I would come back, that I would be a teacher here. I thought a few times about changing my major during college, because I thought that I wouldn't be able to teach anywhere but High Meadows. The time I spent here was probably the happiest of my childhood. To have that again as an adult, why not? It's perfect. △