



Among Friends

Reflections from our Head of School.

Steve de Beer

friendsschoolboulder.org

February 11, 2016

Family and Meditation



Jana Bledsoe at the Shambala Mountain Center

Each year, Friends' Schools gives awards from the Polly T. Donald Enrichment Fund.

My predecessor, Polly Donald, Friends' Head of School for seventeen years, believes that an individual's personal growth inevitably enriches those with whom he or she comes into contact. In her name, the school created the Polly T. Donald Enrichment Fund, which aims to revitalize, inspire and support the personal growth of Friends' faculty and staff.

This year, the award winners were preschool teacher Jessie Vanden Hogan and administrative assistant Jana Bledsoe. Jana oversees our Alumni Association, as well as supports the work of the development, business, and admissions offices and helps to keep me sane and organized. Each received

a cash award so they could pursue a passion and feel inspired.

Summaries of Jessie's and Jana's experiences follow:

This past summer I was fortunate enough to receive a PTD grant, which afforded me the opportunity to connect with my entire family on a memorable trip to Kauai. With half of my family living in the States (Boulder, CO and Green Bay, WI - go Pack!) and the other half living in Australia (Sydney and Old Toongabbie, NSW), we try to get together every 5 years and this was our summer to all be in one place.

After a month-long traumatic event with my nephew last January (with many complications still ongoing), my family felt a pull towards needing to honor our plan to spend some quality time together

Friends School in Boulder, CO



Subscribe To

 Posts 

 Comments 

Follow by Email

Steve de Beer, Head of School



[View my complete profile](#)

[Steve de Beer](#) served as head of school at [Friends School](#) in Boulder, Colorado from 2011 until June 2018. He is now head of school at Westside School in Seattle, WA. He blogs regularly about school and education. Originally from West Sussex, England, he was a theater director and elementary school teacher for over 20 years. Steve chaired the annual conference of the Association of Colorado Independent Schools for six years and served on a professional review committee for Making Caring Common, a project of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. He speaks nationally on social emotional curriculum. Steve has been published in the [Denver Post](#), [5280 Magazine](#) and [Boulder County Business Report](#). In 2015, Friends' School was the only school in Colorado to be selected as one of the [Top 50 private schools in the country](#).

to decompress, continue healing, and celebrate life. What are the first words that come to mind to describe your feelings of spending 10 days in the same cozy house with 13 of your family members...as an adult? Believe it or not, my first words are: Rejuvenation, Renewal, Laughter, Love, Fun, Connection, Balance, and even Growth! It was hot, hot, hot and humid, humid, humid, but there was no shortage of connection, fun and love. Everyone had their moment to shine. We snorkeled, cooked amazingly colorful, tasty meals, took photos, told stories, played bar dice, hugged, cried, danced, and laughed.



Jessie with Connor and his sister Annabelle

This gift gave me quality time with my family that fed my soul. It was a therapeutic trip for all of us. I am so lucky to be able to leave my family and come home to my Friends’ School family. I am so grateful to everyone who contributed to this fund and to Polly who always helped me to think and grow outside of my box. This experience refreshed and reenergized me, as well as inspired me to grow as a teacher, co-worker, aunt, sister, daughter, granddaughter, and friend.



Jessie hugging her 'little' brother Pieter who lives in Australia

As far as my nephew Connor, his journey and his ability to live by his hero Vince Lombardi’s quote was a lesson to all of us to persevere...

“It’s not whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get up.” - Vince Lombardi

He has taught us all to celebrate life and that is what we were all doing in that cozy house on a tiny island in-between the States and Oz. Good on ya mate, no worries!

Warmly,
Jessie

Namaste!

The Polly Talbot Donald Enrichment Fund is a phenomenal gift of revitalization. I chose to use my award to attend a week-long intensive mindful meditation program at the Shambala Mountain Center at Red Feathers Lake. My goal was to do something radically out of my comfort zone. I was hoping for an experience that would shift my paradigm from a “tasking” lifestyle, working 2 jobs and single parenting, to one of mindful awareness, adding more depth and breadth to my life.

I was a bit nervous when I discovered that I was the only participant in the program who had never meditated before. I thought perhaps I should have reflected upon the



[Read Boulder County Business Report's January 2012 article on Friends School and Steve's role as Head of School.](#)

Total Pageviews

9259492594

Friends School



Friends School Mission

Friends School is a supportive, dynamic community committed to educating the whole child – head, hand, and heart – and to training exceptional teachers for tomorrow’s classrooms. We provide a strong academic foundation while developing creative expression and nurturing a passion for learning. Our students gain a deep understanding of themselves and are inspired to act with compassion and integrity.

Search This Blog

Blog Archive

- [2018](#) (18)
- [2017](#) (36)
- ▼ [2016](#) (35)
 - [December](#) (3)
 - [November](#) (3)
 - [October](#) (4)
 - [September](#) (4)
 - [August](#) (2)
 - [May](#) (3)
 - [April](#) (4)
 - [March](#) (4)
 - ▼ [February](#) (4)

meaning of “immersion” before registering. The next seven days would consist of 14 hours of meditation....each day. The 14 hours involved sitting meditation interspersed with walking meditation as well as three meals, which were “performed” ritualistically, in silence, on our cushions, using the basic principles of Oryoki.

I actually found the first day exhilarating and remember thinking “oh, this isn’t so hard”. I came to realize that I wasn’t actually meditating at all but instead “thinking” about all of the things that I was grateful for. Come to find out, “thinking” is actually the

antithesis of meditating. I didn’t have a clue. I struggled the next day to try to “clear my mind” which proved to be about as easy as herding 120 cats with a couple pit bulls thrown in for additional distraction.

In theory, mindfulness meditation practice couldn’t be simpler: take a good seat, pay attention to the breath, and when your attention wanders, return. How could something so simple be so difficult? 14 hours felt like 14 days when it was broken up into 60-second intervals of success before the next assault of “thought” bombarded me like a Star Wars fleet. The paradox was that when I was able to just be present to my mind and body, the stress would quiet down—but when I tried to quiet my mind down, I would just add fuel to the fire. This realization eventually allowed my intervals of “quiet” to increase. Over the course of the week, I found my entire nervous system slowing down. Every day seemed to bring with it a profound introspection and appreciation for the simplicity of eating, breathing, walking, essentially just “being”. Every day the practice became somewhat easier, but also more profound. By the end of the week, my eyes had been opened to the richness of simple mindful living, I had a set of tools to work with, and most importantly, my heart was open.

I want to thank all of the members of the Polly Talbot Donald Enrichment Fund committee for giving me the opportunity to “revitalize, inspire and support my personal growth”. This experience was truly one of the most profound experiences I’ve ever had. Life happens and I suspect that the journey to living mindfully will be progress not perfection. I am beyond grateful, thanks to this experience, to now have a “touch stone” to serve as my compass. Priceless.

“Meditation is not escape from society, but to come back to ourselves and see what is going on. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. With mindfulness, we know what to do and what not to do to truly help.” Thich Nhat Hanh

Jana



[Expanding Our Influence](#)

[Affirming What Friends’ Does Best](#)

[Family and Meditation](#)

[Seeing Through Others’ Eyes](#)

► [January](#) (4)

► [2015](#) (35)

► [2014](#) (36)

► [2013](#) (36)

► [2012](#) (38)

► [2011](#) (16)

Previous Topics

[25th Anniversary](#) (9) [30th Birthday](#) (3) [accreditation](#) (5) [ACIS](#) (7) [activism](#) (1) [admissions](#) (9) [adoption](#) (1) [alumni news](#) (12) [annual fund](#) (5) [art](#) (15) [auction](#) (11) [brain research](#) (7) [celebrations](#) (42) [character education](#) (21) [choice time](#) (2) [citizenship](#) (9) [class buddies](#) (7) [communicating with kids](#) (2) [community](#) (49) [community board](#) (13) [community service](#) (5) [creativity](#) (28) [curriculum](#) (9) [Destination Imagination](#) (4) [diversity](#) (5) [eclipse](#) (1) [election](#) (4) [elementary school](#) (68) [environmental sustainability](#) (3) [executive function](#) (9) [field trips](#) (11) [flood](#) (1) [global learning](#) (9) [goal setting](#) (6) [gratitude](#) (31) [growth mindset](#) (12) [heroes](#) (3) [history](#) (7) [Impact of Giving Back](#) (6) [importance of play](#) (16) [independent schools](#) (15) [innovation](#) (26) [integrated curriculum](#) (38) [joy](#) (2) [language](#) (14) [leadership](#) (17) [literacy](#) (3) [literature](#) (5) [love of children](#) (11) [maker movement](#) (8) [marketing](#) (4) [math](#) (12) [mediation](#) (2) [middle school](#) (25) [mindfulness](#) (15) [music](#) (13) [NAIS](#) (7) [new head](#) (3) [nurturing spirits](#) (1) [Olympics](#) (1) [P.E.](#) (6) [Parent Council](#) (4) [parents](#) (28) [participation](#) (7) [PassageWorks](#) (4) [playground](#) (7) [poetry](#) (4) [preschool](#) (47) [professional development](#) (1) [PTD Fund](#) (5) [recess](#) (3) [robotics](#) (6) [safety](#) (4) [school history](#) (3) [school mascot](#) (1) [school mission](#) (14) [science](#) (29) [social media](#) (3) [social studies](#) (6) [social/emotional curriculum](#) (31) [solar energy](#) (4) [Spanish language](#) (1) [spelling](#) (3) [staff stories](#) (47) [student council](#) (5) [summer program](#) (5) [Teacher Preparation Program](#) (27) [technology](#) (10) [The Gratitude Project](#) (8) [theater](#) (12) [transitions](#) (13) [video](#) (2) [vulnerability](#) (1) [weather](#) (3) [White House Film Festival](#) (4) [whole child](#) (7) [writing](#) (4) [yoga](#) (3)

Keep the conversation going! If something you read strikes you, please feel free to add a comment. All comments welcome.

If you enjoy what you read, you are warmly encouraged to share on your Facebook page or forward to your friends and family. There are easy buttons to do this under each article.

Posted by [Steve de Beer](#) at 12:08 PM



Labels: [mindfulness](#), [PTD Fund](#), [staff stories](#)

No comments:

Subscribe to: [Post Comments \(Atom\)](#)

Friends School is an independent elementary and preschool in Boulder, Colorado. It is a school that challenges students and teachers to reach their full potential through academic excellence, creative expression, and social responsibility. It has small, collaborative classrooms, exceptional teachers, a connected parent community, and a highly regarded teacher preparation program. Students learn respect for themselves, others, and our world. Learn more at www.friendsschoolboulder.org