

DOWNTOWN BALTIMORE CHILDREN'S CENTERS DBCC NEWS

DOWNTOWN BALTIMORE CHILD CARE, Inc.
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April, 2006

THE CLASS MENAGERIE *By Susan Sandstrom*

As a teacher of young children, I filled my classroom with pets. Pets added so much to the daily life of the children that it is hard for me to imagine working in a classroom without them. Whenever possible I did not cage the animals so the children, teachers and pets learned to live together and share the same environment.

One year a parent brought me a baby bird she had found on the parking lot. It still had a piece of shell on its body so I knew the odds of keeping it alive were slim. The children crowded around to see the baby bird and one of the children announced, "We'll call her Janice MacGregor--" and Janice MacGregor it was! I started feeding her bits of dog food on the end of a chopstick and, much to my surprise, she thrived. The children got very involved with the baby bird and several of them learned to feed her. Before too long, (and after a lot of effort!) she grew into a full-grown mockingbird.

Janice MacGregor did not live in a cage and she was very interested in everything the children did. Once she was big enough to hop around she became one of the group. During story time she'd perch on a child's leg or shoulder and listen to the story--at least it looked that way. She loved watching the children play and at lunchtime we all tried to feed her small pieces of food. Sometimes she would find a quiet space and nap but always, when it was time for the children to go outside, she hopped after them.

Later, when the children gathered on the steps to go back inside, Janice MacGregor waited with them. Then she hopped up the steps with the children into her classroom.

Her favorite place outside on the playground was the sand area. The children would dig deep holes and she would move like lightening to eat the worms and insects they unearthed. The children would get mad at her because just as they reached for a worm, Janice

MacGregor pounced on it.

Eventually I filled the water table with potting soil and earthworms. The children and Janice MacGregor dug through the dirt searching for worms. It was an amazing sight to see a mockingbird and a small group of little children working cooperatively and I made sure there were plenty of worms for everyone!

The children accepted the bird as a part of the classroom and no one thought it unusual to walk around with a mockingbird on their

shoulder.

It was interesting that Janice MacGregor never explored other parts of the school. She stayed with her classmates, following them inside and outside, and I must admit, it was a treat having her around.

One day, weeks after she arrived, Janice MacGregor went outside with the children as usual but when it was time to come in--she hesitated. The children called to her but she perched on the fence and stayed outside. When

(Cont'd on page 2)



Stephanie Rogers, Allison Goldberg and Janice MacGregor



Our most successful Spring Fling ever!
We raised over \$16,000! See pages 5-7



THE CLASS MENAGERIE *(Cont'd from page 1)*

we went back outside in the afternoon she was gone. From time to time we saw a mockingbird in the next yard and the children cried, "There she is!" and called to her. But, Janice MacGregor had joined the wild mockingbirds and moved on to a new life.

☛ One day I bought a small iguana that was probably six inches long for the classroom. I didn't know much about iguanas at the time, but I learned very fast. Stewart grew at an amazing rate and eventually wouldn't fit in his aquarium. (He grew to about four feet long.) Stewart was able to roam freely around the classroom and thankfully he was paper-trained like a puppy. The children handled him a lot so he became very friendly. His favorite place in the classroom was in the water table when it was filled with warm water. The children had special Stewart toothbrushes and scrubbed his back while Stewart closed his eyes in ecstasy. He loved to have his back scratched especially when he was shedding his skin. The children hand fed him green beans and bananas and became quite used to him climbing in their laps.



*Stewart
the iguana
and friends*

Once, while the group was gathered for a story, Stewart perched on the edge of his aquarium and the children noticed an odd protuberance under his tail. "What's that?" asked a child. We looked closely but no one knew what it was. We did some research and we discovered that male iguanas have a double penis on either side of their body just under their tail-- in actuality, four penises. This amazing fact was the topic of much conversation in the classroom and all over the center.

One day I noticed a small sore on Stewart's mouth and took him immediately to the vet. His treatment was an injection in his back every day for six weeks to cure a calcium deficiency. I learned how to inject him and the children learned how to hold him to prevent his tail from whipping me as he had his injection every day. Thankfully he healed rapidly. We fashioned a harness and leash for Stewart and we often brought him out on the playground. He loved walking through the grass and climbing on a rock to sun

himself. Stewart spent many years in my classroom before retiring to a nature camp, too large to keep in the classroom. ☛ My white rats, Cindy Lou and Joe, were the perfect pets. They lived in a large aquarium but the children were able to remove them at will. Rats are very hardy and I highly recommend them for young children. They can take rough handling and they become very tame. The children dressed them in doll clothes and more than one visitor was startled to see Joe in a doll carriage wearing a bonnet and a little dress. The rats sat comfortably on the children's shoulders or laps and were very gentle.

Cindy Lou died unexpectedly after a couple of months. The children were full of questions and stories and after a brief funeral, life went on. I had Joe in my classroom for much longer and when he died the children had a stronger reaction. They placed him in a shoebox and a few children took him to every room in the center so everyone could say goodbye. (The new administrative assistant in the office almost fainted when she peered into the box. She had worked previously at a legal firm and was not used to such things!) Several of the children cried periodically throughout the day and this grief generated a rush of stories, poems and songs from the children. Never have I witnessed such a reaction in a group of young children. They were grief stricken! They missed him terribly and his funeral was incredibly touching. Everyone spoke tearfully about Joe and what he meant to them and near the end of the funeral a child suggested we sing a song to Joe. Finally a song was decided upon and we sang, dirge-like, "Happy Birthday" which was, to the children, the most special song.

☛ My favorite pet of all was Robin the rabbit. He was litter trained and never caged. He was a large, rex rabbit with brown, velvety fur who was always gentle. He seemed drawn to the sad or needy children and I often saw him put his soft rabbit head in a child's lap as if to make him/her feel better!

I learned that rabbits are well equipped to take care of themselves. If a child was rough, Robin boxed the child with his front paws with sudden movements. It was quite startling to the child yet inflicted no injury. If Robin was really mad he thumped his hind leg and scurried off. I didn't have to worry about the children harming him. If Robin was in a happy mood he raced around as fast as he could or hopped circles around a person's legs or leaped into the air



Robin and Joe

like an acrobat. He was a character!

Robin was cute but he was also a very naughty creature. The children loved him but he had a bad habit of knocking down their block buildings. More than once a child would come to me and complain, "Robin pushed my tower down again." The children experimented with barricades to keep him away but he had a knack of jumping over them to get to the buildings. Many times I saw children lying on the floor in front of Robin complaining about his bad behavior. He was always attentive to the child but, alas, his bad behavior continued.

Every once in a great while and always while I was reading aloud to the group, Robin would sneak up behind me and nip me on the bottom. I, of course, would scream, the children would laugh and Robin would go hopping across the room. I feigned anger and reprimanded him loudly but to no avail.

Robin was never allowed out of the classroom but he spent his days plotting his escape. If he ventured near the door we started clapping which was his signal to go back in the room. This worked fairly well but there were times he slipped by us. One day he hopped into the Director's office, where she was meeting with a bank executive, and started chewing on the man's shoelace. The man watched in amazement as his shoelace fell onto the floor, thanks to Robin's razor teeth. Two children came into the office clapping for Robin who obediently left the office and hopped back into his classroom. The following week the man sent a contribution to the center!

🐸 Billy the crayfish lived for a long time in an aquarium on the counter. One morning, not long after he joined our menagerie, we found Billy dead on the bottom of the tank. The children gathered around and I removed him from the tank only to discover that a much bigger Billy was hiding behind the rock. He had simply shed his shell. The children examined the shell until it disintegrated. We weren't fooled again and every six weeks or so he shed his skin until he got quite large.

The children enjoyed fishing for Billy. I configured two small fishing poles with a piece of food tied to the string. Billy would grab onto the food and if the children were very careful they could pull Billy up to the surface of the water where he always let go and dropped back gently to the bottom of the tank. Sometimes we put a worm into his tank and it was fascinating to see him wrestle with the worm and then slowly feed the end of it into his mouth which was located in his chest.

🐸 These animals (and many others including fish, cockatiels, parakeets, snakes and Fluffy the cockroach) became the curriculum. I anthropomorphized every animal and we talked to them as if they understood everything we said. I think this helped the children develop empathy for the pets. Those children who had a hard time transitioning to school brought a carrot for the rabbit or helped feed the fish after saying goodbye to mom. I stocked a library of books about the pets we had and children paged through them or asked to have them read aloud. We learned all about the behaviors

of these animals, their food, the differences in excrement, physiology, their likes and dislikes, their habits and how to care for them. Almost every day we learned new things about our pets.

The animals made us laugh and cry and get angry and the children learned about feelings. We learned to take comfort from pets and to give comfort to them. They learned the enjoyment and delight of having a pet and also about death and grief. They learned to be kind and the consequences of not being kind. They learned to problem solve and to deal with difficult behaviors sometimes creatively but not always effectively. Those children who had a hard time relating to peers seemed to take a special interest in the pets. Often it was a bridge to better social skills.

Sadly one doesn't see many animals in classrooms today. There are allergies and sanitation concerns and more rigid licensing regulations that rob children of valuable learning opportunities. It takes time and effort to maintain a healthy environment with free roaming pets but it is not impossible. To see a young child gently brush a rabbit and then have the rabbit crawl into his/her lap is heartwarming. To have an angry, defiant child seek comfort from a cuddly white rat is wonderful. It is magical for children to have the opportunity to live with and learn from animals.

CLASSROOM EULOGY TO JOE THE RAT

We miss you.

I'm sad about Joe.

I feel like I'm gonna cry right now.

I really miss Joe and no matter what happens

I'll still have him in my heart.

I love Joe and I'm sad cause I want him to come alive.

I miss Joe.

I'll never forget him.

I want him to come alive.

I'll always think about him.

I love Joe so much and I think Cindy does too.

I want him to come alive again.

I don't want him dead.

I love you Joe the best.

I like him and we have his medicine and his food
and I love him.

Joe is my best friend and I like Cindy too -
but I love them both.

I want Joe to come home.

I want to play with him.

I miss Joe.

I'll never forget him.

ALUMNUS NEWS • We recently received this note:

Dear DBCC,

After receiving a large amount of money for my Bar Mitzvah, I have decided to give a large portion of it to DBCC. Please use my check to give more kids a great start to their childhoods, like the one you gave me. Hope to visit again.

Josh Potash



Dear Aliceanna,

My daughter is two years old and I want to challenge her intellectually by helping her learn her letters. She's bright and eager to learn so why isn't this an emphasis in her classroom.

Signed, Alphabet Ready

Dear A.R.

Aliceanna understands your concern. However, there are far better ways to stimulate your daughter than by teaching her the alphabet. It is not important to learn letters when you are only two or three. Ultimately she will learn letters quickly and easily when she is ready and with very little instruction. Children love to sing the alphabet song and some children get interested in letters early. Give her the information she requests but Aliceanna believes if you want to help your daughter get smart, there are more important things to focus on.

What follows are a few examples of better ways to stimulate your young child.

Pose open-ended questions. (Questions where there is no right or wrong answer) What do you feel like doing today? I wonder what your teacher is doing today? While you are reading a story--What do you think will happen next? Etc.

Ask questions about her and talk about her. Does she like green eggs and ham? What does she like to eat for breakfast? Tell her what you like to eat. What does Grandma like to eat, etc? Talk about when she was a baby.

Intrigue your child. I wonder why that person is on the ladder? Don't be too quick to give all the answers. Instead, go over and investigate. Let your child discover that the person is painting the house. Notice the tools that are used.

Point out details. How things are constructed. What things are made from? How do things feel? Smell? Next time you are on the grass, point out the individual grass plants that make up a lawn. You will read the same books over and over so think about how you can point out different details or bring something new to the story. Look at everyone's shoes one reading or hair styles the next.

Give your child new experiences. That's easy to do because so much is new. Stop by a little league baseball game and watch it for a short while. Walk into a bank or the local firehouse. Cook with your child and really let her help.

Pose problems. Allow her to open the cereal box herself. You might point out the tab to lift. Maybe suggest a butter knife to help open the tab. Support her and allow her to struggle and ultimately succeed.

Help her learn self-help skills. How to put on her pajamas. How to brush her hair.

Talk to her. Tell her a silly story about your day. Tell her a quick story about when you were her age.

Spend time with her. Enjoy her.

Beware that you don't constantly turn everything into a learning situation. Your daughter will turn off or, worse, feel like she is inadequate. Say very little and let her discover things. Don't pester her. Timing is very important. Your job is to provoke learning. Of course you know so much more than she does. Your daughter knows that too. You want to whet her appetite for learning not provide her with all the answers. Learning is not telling! Above all, have fun and make sure your daughter is having fun!

[Do you have a question for Aliceanna? Email or drop your question in the tuition box at either center. She loves to hear from you!]

CHILDSPEAK

- **Charlie Meisner**, age 2, noticed the patches of sunlight on the rug. "Look Mama, sun puddles!"
- **Brionna White**, age 2, was watching Olympic figure skater, Emily Hughes. "Is that Emily Shenk?" she asked. (Emily Shenk is a classmate.) "No," said her mother. "Is it Emily Shenk's sister?" she asked.
- **Miriam**, age 3, looked upon her 4-month old cousin for the first time. Her mom said, "Look, Miriam, this is your new cousin, Alexander." Miriam: "Can I pet him?"
- **Hannah Yost**, age 5, went into great detail about the new trick she could do on the playground. Her teacher said, "Wow, you ought to go to gymnastic school!" Hannah crossed her arms and said, "My mom says I should go to acting school!"
- **Eva Mamen**, age 3, had a cherry tomato in each hand. "I'm going to eat both of them because I don't want one to be lonely in my stomach." And she did!
- **Dr. Nancy Grasmick**, State Superintendent of Schools, was visiting the center. **Dolly O'Dell**, age 4, was hard at work in the water table. Dr. Grasmick squatted down to talk to her and Dolly looked at her and exclaimed, "Oh, you're so beautiful!"

- The teacher used the word *delightful* and **Jamie Detling-Edall**, age 4, said emphatically, "Well, it's not so delightful that a comet landed on the earth and killed all the dinosaurs!"
- **Wanikiya Whitlock-Dixon**, age 2, was riding the bus with his mother. A passenger on the bus offered Wanikiya a piece of candy and Wanikiya said, "What's wrong with you? Are you some kind of a pervert?"

It's a Boy! It's a Girl!

- Solomon Lubar is a big brother! **Rachel Faye Lubar** was born on March 16, 2006 and weighed 8 lbs. 1 oz. Congratulations to Jessica, Steve and Solomon!
- Benjamin is a big brother! **Samuel Sung-Min Bae** was born on March 26, 2006 and weighed 7 lbs. 5 oz. Congratulations to Jean, Victor and Ben!
- Doris is a grandmother, again! **Makaya LaShay Carver** was born on April 5, 2006 and weighed 6 lbs. 11oz. Congratulations to Yolanda, Aunt Shenell and Doris!
- Jack is a big brother! **Sarah Victoria Webb** was born on April 13, 2006 and weighed 4 lbs. 2 oz. • **Michael James Webb** was born on April 13, 2006 and weighed 4 lbs. 6 oz. • **Lauren Elizabeth Webb** was born on April 13, 2006 and weighed 3 lbs. 14 oz. Congratulations to Sharon, John and Jack!

Spring Fling

This year's event was a huge success! The event raised over \$16,000... an organizational record!

...and a great time was had by all!



(Above)
Gale Minnis and
Leisha Webb



wasafiri dancers

(Right)
Kirsten Blom and
Evelyn Owens



(Below)
Claire Myer and
Sandra Vicchio



(Above)
Shari Simpson,
Greg Wilkins and
Kashawnta Stanley

(Left)
Gwen Chesley and
Scot Kuo



MORE Spring Fling

Spring Fling

★ We all enjoyed the music of **The Rhodes Tavern Troubadours** and as an added bonus the **Wasafiri Dancers** performed. Infant teacher **Jane Kamau** is a member of the troupe and it was one of the highlights of the evening.

★ Special thanks to **David Wells** from **The Wine Source** located on 3601 Elm Avenue in Hamden. David has donated wine and other beverages for our annual events for many years. We also want to thank **Maryland General Hospital** for allowing everyone to park in their lot for free!



The event committee chaired by **Mark Benson** worked tirelessly and DBCC so appreciated all the hard work. Thank you Mark.



★ *Members of the committee included:*

Margaret Cellucci	Edith Garrett	Claudia Wilson-Randall
Gwen Chesley	Jane Kamau	Susan Sandstrom
Maggie de Cuevas	Angie McCadden	Margo Sipes
Sarah Gannett	Karen Meadow	Evelyn Owens
Colette Veasey-Cullors	Cecilia Meisner	Sky Woodward

Other Important Helpers: Kari Appler, Kirsten Blom, Andy Frank, Karen French, Segrid Pearson, Sharon Pula, Eric Schott



The classrooms were drafted to put together baskets of items to auction off and that worked very well. The baskets alone raised \$750.00.



Parents and staff made desserts which were delicious and went very fast!



Desserts were brought by:

Cathy Brennan
Krissy and Greg D'Alesandro
Shari Simpson
Elaine Swift
Beth Raymond
Maggie de Cuevas
Angie McCadden
Angela Palmer
Luciene Parsley
Steve Nishiura and Irene Skricki
Margo Sipes

Lizzy and Chris Menard
Rebecca Richards
Ken and Fatima Marcuse
Kristina Samson
Susan Sandstrom
Rebecca Bainum
Christine Blom
Claire Myer
Kate and Theresa Swift-Scanlan
Kari Appler



★ *Volunteers on the night of the event included:*

Charles Parks, Edith Garrett, Evelyn Owens, Jim French, Tom Blanpied, Nick Cander, Greg and Krissy D'Alesandro, Nancy and Jack Lewin, Maria Korman, Kathy Wilson, Erin Strovel, Sharon Pula, Norman and Karen Meadow, Maggie DeCuevas, Miek Ouwerkerk, Ronald Williams, Margo Sipes, Susan Sandstrom, Collette Veasey-Cullors, Rebecca Bainum, Kate and Teresa Swift-Scanlan, Sandra Vicchio, Claire Myer, Luciene and Andy Parsley, Sarah Gannett, Fred Van Dyk, Gwen Chesley, Deborah C. Williams, Beth Raymond, Claudia Wilson-Randall

Special thanks to our generous sponsors. These include:



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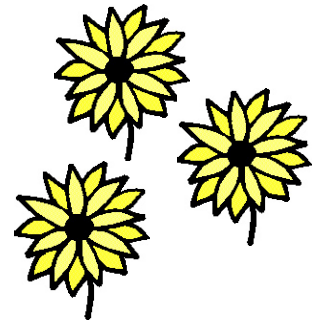


★ ***Additional contributions came from:***

Paul Bekman
 Kristin Benson
 Mark Benson and Andy Frank
 Annette Brennan
 Advance Printing
 Stevenson W. Close
 Margaret Cellucci
 Rachel Cox and Chris Shenk
 Margaret Claybour
 Michael Coar
 Clint Conrad and Hope Jahren
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 Steve Dahl and Irene Kim
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 Stephanie Reich
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 Jennifer Treadway
 Elaine Swift and Ken Finegold
 Keith West and Marie Deiner-West
 Cynthia Wilson
 Jerriann and Don Wilson



★ ***We are very appreciative of the donors who gave us auction items. Auction items brought in \$6123.00.***

Alonso's
 Art Arthur and Sky Woodward
 Baltimore Marriott Waterfront Hotel
 Baltimore Museum of Art
 Baltimore Museum of Industry
 Baltimore Ravens
 Baltimore Symphony Orchestra
 Baltimore Water Taxi
 B & O Railroad Museum
 Beadazzled
 Belles Fleurs
 Hugh Bethell & Sarah Gannett
 Big Bus Baltimore
 Black Olive Restaurant
 Bratt Décor
 Byong-Il Bae & Jean-Ju Chung
 Michael Lamason
 Andy Kane
 Ceriello's Italian Grocer
 The Classic Catering People
 Copra Restaurant
 Karen French
 Sarah Gannett and Sharon Pula
 Glasz Café
 Port Discovery
 Marya Plotkin
 Beth Raymond
 Sascha's 527 Café
 Shanigan's
 Theresa Swift-Scanlan
 USS Constellation Foundation
 Walk the Dog Petsitting
 Maria Rosa Watson
 Walters Art Museum
 Woodhall Vineyards and Winery
 Zena's Hair Studio
 Kelly Zimmerman



Hampton Inn & Suites
 Harbor Cruises
 Haystack Mountain Goat Dairy
 Heery International
 Hopkins Symphony Orchestra
 Hyatt Regency Inner Harbor
 Imperial Half Bushel Silver
 Kids First Swim School
 Deborah Kleinmann ("Spice")
 Kumari
 Scot Kuo & Jean Schroeder
 Bob Kramer
 Life Smells Good
 Loco Hombre
 Karen Meadow
 Irene Kim and Steve Dahl
 M & T Bank
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 Mughal Garden
 National Aquarium in Baltimore
 Neal's The Hair Studio
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 Taste Redefined Restaurant
 Studio 921 Salon
 Vaccaro's Italian Pastry
 Walter's Art Museum
 Denise Weber
 Sky Woodward and Art Arthur
 Wendy Wu
 Yves Delorme



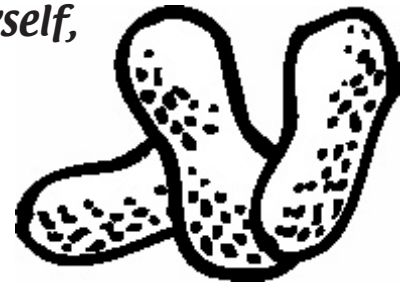
WORTHY WAGE DAY IS MAY 1ST

It is a day early childhood educators advocate for better wages and benefits. Every year thousands of professionals leave the field because they cannot afford to stay. On this day we remind everyone that early childhood educators play an important role in educating this country's children-a role for which they are vastly under-compensated.

Did you know the average early childhood educator is paid less than the average parking lot attendant? Yes, that's right - you can earn more watching cars than educating children.

Whether you're an early childhood educator yourself, or just someone who thinks this is plain "nuts" - we need your help.

Teachers are tired of working for peanuts!



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***Childhood should be
a journey, not a race.***