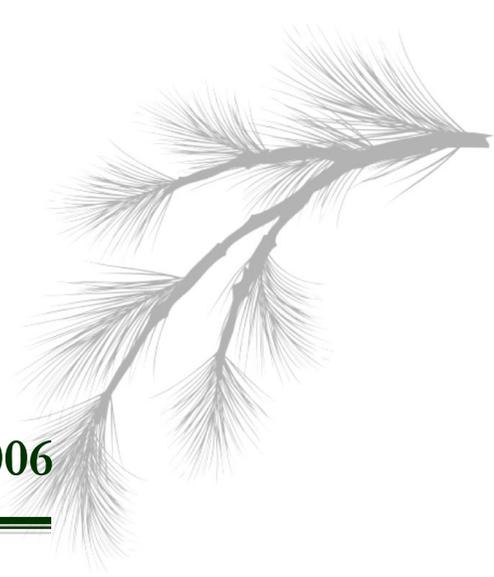


Carolina Friends School

Quaker Education, Three Cups of Tea, and Why We Value What We Do

Mike Hanas

We & Thee ~ Fall 2006



During my first week as a dance student, Annie Dwyer, the dance instructor at CFS, described dance as a way to communicate what we value, without words.

I think there can be no doubt that a development campaign that prioritizes staff salaries, tuition aid, and the very composition of our community, communicates what we value.

Similarly, I think it fair to see our newest building, the Upper School Meeting Hall, as a statement about what we value. This building is both simple and beautiful. It was economical to build and is very effective. This building is the product of collaboration in design, and built with stewardship of the planet in mind.

I believe that CFS makes a profound difference in the lives of our children, our families, our community, and even our world.

I'm convinced that the world is a better place when schools like CFS thrive--and that the world would benefit if there were more schools like this one.

Unfortunately, the truth is that there are very few schools like CFS. Simply put, our DNA is unique, not perfect, but an unusual blend of school as we know it and as it can be.

Possibilities abound here.

The genes that comprise that DNA are many, and they include:

- 1) The development of skills that enable students to find the answers to the questions on their minds;
- 2) The development of students who are in control of their learning, who know how they learn best and how to advocate for themselves, and who know how to stand up for what is right and how to contribute what they can.
- 3) Staff members, new and returning, embrace a genetic code that inclines us to search for the terms under which we can say "Yes!" to a student's proposal or request, even the kind that in other settings would beg a question like, "What are you, crazy?" in response.

Those genes are readily apparent in countless efforts (in classrooms, projects, performances, and meetings for business for worship) that help students to make authentically clear and compelling expressions of who they are and to express their unique talents in constructive ways.

That genetic composition is made manifest in our service work with migrant farm workers in Newton Grove, building homes and community centers in El Salvador and Costa Rica, and in local agencies throughout the Triangle.

At CFS we are not in the business of forcing pegs into holes of any shape or form, and we recognize that the world today calls out for new examples of how to solve problems.

I'm convinced that the world is a better place when schools like CFS thrive.

In a recent essay on education in the US and Asia, Richard Brodhead, the president of Duke University, found things to praise about education abroad. But he questioned whether “the very strengths of their system may prevent the fostering of a versatile, innovative style of intelligence,” the very kind of intelligence we know that our children need to thrive in a constantly changing world. President Brodhead suggested that “...the country that will do the best is not the one that will find the magic fix. Rather, it will be the one that asks, in the deepest ways, what education is for and what human traits it is meant to foster.” He added, more specifically, “We (in the U.S.) need to promote everything in our system that breeds initiative, independence, resourcefulness and collaboration.” The very traits that the world desperately needs are those that CFS most intentionally teaches our students while they learn math, writing, science, music, art, service, and foreign language.

But not everyone understands CFS; you know that. Shouldn't that be the case, if we really are different? In fact, I suspect that most in our community were educated in schools very different from this one. Nonetheless, our students earn admission to the Summer Ventures in Math and Science and the N.C. Governor's School, placements in professional dance companies, and acceptances and scholarships at an extraordinary range of colleges. At CFS we resist the temptation to define ourselves by means of scores and numbers and lists, and we don't spend nearly as much as other schools do for marketing, but the frequency with which our students are identified as compelling candidates for countless opportunities speaks volumes.

This year the CFS Board of Trustees will facilitate the School's fourth Long-Range Planning process, and each one of us will have the opportunity to wonder and share perspectives on how our calling, the mission of this Quaker School, has evolved and how best to respond. We are now one of many deliberately integrated independent schools in the southeast, and I wonder what our commitment to diversity summons us to do next, perhaps in response to

the rapidly growing Spanish speaking population in the Triangle and state of North of Carolina. I wonder, too, how we can be more deliberately international in programs and practices. This year alone, the School community includes students from Afghanistan, Germany, Korea, Nicaragua, and Rwanda, as well as families that have been traveling around the world, and CFS students studying abroad in Germany and Panama.

If you haven't seen the film *An Inconvenient Truth*, I hope you will. I saw the film in early August and wondered if climate change will pose for our generation the kind of challenge that civil rights and integration did for the founders of the School.

Even if it is only one of our most significant challenges, all indications are that it will summon all the very best creativity, imagination, and engagement we can muster. What better way to frame the study of math, the importance of scientific method, the powerful impact of clear and compelling prose and public speech, the use of computer graphics to bring statistics to life!! The very stuff CFS teachers love to do.

Recently, I've been reading, with the organizers of our Afghan Sister School Project, a book called *Three Cups of Tea*, by Greg Mortenson, a former mountaineer who became Director of the Central Asia Institute. Its subtitle reads "One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations . . . One School at a Time," and I'd like to share a section that offers a rich illustration of learning, leadership, and service in the context of community.

It chronicles the time when Mortenson was in Korphe (Pakistan), intent on building a school, finally had everything he needed, and was driving the local people very hard.

One clear afternoon at the beginning of August, Haji Ali tapped Mortenson on the shoulder at the construction site and asked him to take a walk. The old man led the former climber uphill for an hour, on legs still strong enough to humble the much younger man. Mortenson felt precious time slipping away, and by the time Haji Ali halted on a narrow ledge high above the village, Mortenson was panting, as much from the thought of all the tasks he was failing to supervise as from his exertion.

Haji Ali waited until Mortenson caught his breath then instructed him to look at the view. The air had the fresh-scrubbed clarity that only comes with altitude. Beyond Korphe K2, the ice peaks of the inner Karakoram knifed relentlessly into a defenseless blue sky. A thousand feet below, Korphe, green with ripening barley fields, looked small and vulnerable, a life raft adrift on a sea of stone.

Haji Ali reached up and laid his hand on Mortenson's shoulder. "These mountains have been here a long time," he said. "And so have we." He reached for his rich brown lambswool topi, the only symbol of authority Korphe's nurmadhar ever wore, and centered it on his silver hair. "You can't tell the mountains what to do," he said, with an air of gravity that transfixed Mortenson as much as the view. "You must learn to listen to them. So now I am asking you to listen to me. By the mercy of Almighty Allah, you have done much for my people, and we appreciate it. But now you must do one more thing for me."

“Anything,” Mortenson said.

“Sit down. And shut your mouth” Haji Ali said. “You’re making everyone crazy.”

“Then he reached out and took my plumb line, and my level and my account book, and he walked back down to Korphe,” Mortenson says. “I followed him all the way to his house, worrying about what he was doing. He took the key he always kept around his neck on a leather thong, opened a cabinet decorated with faded Buddhist wood carvings, and locked my things in there, alongside a shank of curing ibex, his prayer beads, and his old British musket gun. Then he asked Sakina to bring us tea.”

Mortenson waited nervously for half an hour while Sakina brewed the paiyu cha. Haji Ali ran his fingers along the text of the Koran that he cherished above all his belongings, turning pages randomly and mouthing almost silent Arabic prayer as he stared out into inward space.

When the porcelain bowls of scalding butter tea steamed in their hands, Haji Ali spoke. “If you want to thrive in Baltistan, you must respect our ways,” Haji Ali said, blowing on his bowl. “The first time you share tea with a Balti, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family, and for our family, we are prepared to do anything, even die,” he said, laying his hand warmly on Mortenson’s own. “Doctor Greg, you must make time to share three cups of tea. We may be uneducated. But we are not stupid. We have lived and survived here for a long time.”

“That day, Haji Ali taught me the most important lesson I’ve ever learned in my life,” Mortenson says. “We Americans think you have to accomplish everything quickly. We’re the country of thirty-minute power lunches and two-minute football drills. Our leaders thought their ‘shock and awe’ campaign could end the war in Iraq before it even started. Haji Ali taught me that I had more to learn from the people I work with than I could ever hope to teach them.”

Now at CFS the challenges we face may not closely resemble those that the people of Afghanistan--and Iraq--and so many other places in the world are facing. But they are many and real. And so too, are our opportunities to make a difference. We are a resolutely Quaker School, animated by the belief that there is that of God in each one of us. And we share in the responsibility to bring to bear the unique gifts we have to offer the world, both as individuals and as a community.

That’s why **I think the world is a better place when CFS thrives.** And why **I think I have the best job in the world.**