

It seems like my first 2 years here have been about slowly reaching milestones that move us closer to getting back to life as it was before the pandemic. Tonight is one more, & maybe the last, step in that direction. For the first time since September of 2019, here we are, all crammed together to meet and celebrate another year in our storied history of play-based, child-centered education.

Let's look around at each other, and collectively thank one another for showing up and being here tonight. This is our community, on our historic and spacious campus and in-person once again. I'm so thankful to be here standing in front of you tonight.

Before we break into our groups, I want to thank you for bringing your child to this place. Because you found this place for your child, they are in the midst of, or are beginning a journey that, only a small population of children – even with the almost 75 years we have been in existence – have experienced. I want to thank you for your trust in this school, and in our unique philosophy. You join us in what is, sadly, still considered a radical and revolutionary approach to education. Our collective wisdom tells us this is an empowering move on your part, and that it matters to you that your child finds their sense of self, and that we collectively protect who they are by allowing them to be and become without being encumbered by a set-schedule of expectations and benchmarks. Thank you for this trust.

During our workshop weeks before school started this year, our staff viewed the movie that was put together for our historical 50th anniversary. There are so many great parts to it, and we were greatly inspired by the many voices from our past. We will share this movie with you soon. Look for the link in an upcoming weekly notice, so that you can all get a chance to see it as well. For me, the most striking part of this film was a quote from our school's founder, Phyllis Fleishman, when she asked someone to be a substitute teacher at the school. The person said, "But I don't know anything about teaching!" Phyllis said, "It doesn't matter, you will learn from everything you do!" To me, this point she made, of us learning and making it up, as we go along, is what Play Mountain has always been about. We don't decide what children need to know, when they need to know it, or even how they go about learning it. WE provide them with an environment that is physically and, maybe even more importantly, EMOTIONALLY safe. This allows students to relax, let down their defenses, and remain open to the life learning that goes on here every day. The willingness and ability our students have to sit with their feelings, be clear about their limits and boundaries, and to speak up when those limits and boundaries are not being respected is profound. These are skills that I find are sorely lacking in our world. I believe many of us end up here because we remember our own curiosity, dreams, or interests being squelched, downplayed, ignored, and, in too many cases, maybe even quashed or ridiculed.

So, as always, I want to encourage you, as your child begins to stretch, look for ways to stretch yourself. As your child articulates their boundaries, do the work that helps you understand and articulate your own boundaries. And when your child challenges themselves and YOU in ways that are new, work to be open to challenge yourself. Do the work and really live this philosophy beyond the hours of the school day.

**Show up** to the parent meetings, parents seminars, coffees, events, and work days. **Connect** with the people here. Look around, this is who we are! Go ahead and have those playovers, go to the birthday parties, spend a little time at the park after school, or go have coffee with another parent before heading home or to work. Each one of those efforts will enrich your life.

I want to end with a story an alumnus shared with us. He gave a speech at his 8th grade culmination and in it he mentioned that through 5th grade he attended a school that didn't emphasize traditional academics. When he finished, one of his teachers came up to him and said, 'Yeah, but you got something so much more important. A lot of your classmates could use what you got there.' "What you got there." What we are doing here, in the children's program, everyday, and we want to share that with you as parents takes some time. It's an investment. Honestly, for me, all these 40 some years here in my own personal history with Play Mountain Place have been the best investment I've ever made in my life. Since I arrived here, somewhere in the 80s, as a young teacher, and then teaching the Communication Skills Workshops for some 30 years, and ultimately as a parent on the same journey you are on today. I've had the experience, and I've sat in those uncomfortable children's chairs, and they were often the best seats in the house. And now I stand here as the Director of this special place, and the "What I got there" informs me in everything I do. I don't waver in my devotion to this school, your children's journey, and to your journey too. I'm really glad you are here. Let's have a great year!