



SOME THINGS (HAPPILY) NEVER CHANGE

THE SACHS FAMILY LOOKS BACK

A few months ago Arthur Sachs was going through some files and realized he still had the original paperwork related to West Side Montessori School's purchase of 305 West 92nd Street in 1974.*

Art was a WSMS board member for ten years and longtime treasurer of the board, and his wife Mary had written the *Wireless*, conducted admissions interviews, and served

on the financial aid committee for many years. As active parents from 1977 to 1987, they had experienced the transition from Penny Pi-Sunyer to Marlene Barron as head of school and seen the installation of the rooftop play space. Their three sons had each experienced WSMS in different ways, then gone on to Collegiate and college and independent lives. Art and Mary attended the alumni party introducing Mimi Basso as head of school in 2008, but that was a chance to socialize with dear friends, not to see the school where their children's academic lives began. So, with the excuse of making sure important documents were in their proper place, and fascinated by what they had been seeing in *Great Beginnings*, Art and Mary returned recently for an in-depth visit to WSMS after an absence of almost twenty years.



Tim '86, Chris '83, Mary, Art, Andrew '80



How things have changed! The greening of WSMS encompasses not just the classrooms and the food service, but the communications. For many years the *Wireless* provided news from each classroom as well as from the PA and head of school. Mary remembers gently cajoling PA committee chairs who thought they had no news to report to talk about their activities of the prior month. The *Wireless*, despite its name, was in fact a photocopied document, distributed to parents by hand. How different things are today, with our weekly e-mail communications from every teacher filled with classroom news and pictures of the children's accomplishments!

There were other changes, too. The Garden classroom, where oldest son Andrew began his WSMS career in 1977, is substantially larger, thanks to an expansion to the rear

property line in 1995-96. The reception desk is at the front door instead of at the rear of the foyer. The Parents Room (which was transformed into the Parents Room/Library this summer) has a sophisticated coffee machine, comfortable furniture, and natural wood accents. The ceiling mural echoes those times spent nestled on the couch, reading timeless stories to our young children.

But many things are the same: the pink tower, the brown stairs, and the red rods; the many practical life projects; the children sitting at small tables or on mats or at easels, working on their own or collaboratively, creating, writing, building, exploring. . . . In fact, one might speculate that the varying career paths of the Sachs children may reflect the opportunities they experienced at WSMS to explore their interests.



Andrew (7), Tim (1), and Chris (5)

Andrew, the oldest of the Sachs children, was a reserved child but an exuberant artist, creating massive paper drawings (many of which still live in plastic bags under his parents' bed) and spending hours creating complex Lego towns and block constructions. He went on to concentrate in visual and environmental studies at Harvard. Now 36, he is a cinematographer in Los Angeles and will be married in September. When asked about his days at WSMS, Andrew remembers the walk up Riverside Drive to school and the “big” stairs up to the classroom with the “homey feel.” And he specifically recalls “Dad cooking hot dogs and wearing the multicolored striped shirt every year” at the Spring Fair.

Middle son Chris concentrated in literature at Harvard and has since pursued his talent for—and love of—photography, supporting his calling as a fine arts photographer with commercial gigs. A recent six-month stay in Japan was interrupted by the dramatic effects of the tsunami last March, and he has just begun a new intensive position as a photo producer, mainly for fashion and advertising, in New York.

Chris was a child of boundless energy balanced by a fascination with books. Because Collegiate did not have a kindergarten at the time, Chris spent four years at WSMS. He recalls his last year, with favorite teacher Betsy

Hernandez, with particular fondness: “Kindergarten at WSMS was a dream for me. I loved going to school every day. I used to walk up Riverside Drive with my father, holding hands. He would squeeze a certain rhythm to me and I would squeeze it back exactly. This game never got old. At school I was allowed to go as far as I could, whether in math problems (that I would encounter again in second grade at Collegiate), or in abstract paintings that possessed a level of spontaneity I now have to work hard to achieve in my current creations. . . . WSMS was always about tailoring the educational experience to the child, not trying to fit every child into the same size.”

Chris, who is now 34, responded so eloquently when asked about his time at WSMS that he could have been writing an admissions brochure: “As the title of the book by Robert Fulghum goes, I learned everything I ever needed to know in kindergarten. Be as nice to others as you would like them to be to you, if not nicer. Choose your materials and tools carefully, use them wisely, and clean up when you are done. Go at your own speed, not the pace of others. Every pursuit was always a challenge to myself, never a comparison. . . . WSMS was a world full of children and teachers of all hues, filled with warmth and love and the wonderful smell of food. I felt safe and loved and valued, and I knew I could thrive and flourish every day. As long as I didn't hurt anyone I could do whatever

I wanted, and this freedom created the possibility for infinite joy and endless exploration.”

Youngest son Tim recently turned 31. An alumnus of the short-lived “2’s” program—Elspeth McDonald’s classroom (1W) was turned over to two-year-olds every afternoon for a Montessori program designed specifically for that age group—Tim also spent four years at WSMS. And, like big brother Chris, he attended Collegiate and took advantage of the School Year Abroad (SYA) high school program to

and her husband was a board member!)

Tim has many happy memories of WSMS. He too recalls Dad cooking hot dogs at the Spring Fair while he (Tim) rode in the trolley. He remembers “the smell of food when walking down the stairs into the basement/garden level” and naptime and “sitting around, playing with blocks, learning to write my name, listening to stories.” He also has a few stories, too long to repeat here, that are great fodder for those nights reminiscing with family and friends.

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– CHRIS SACHS

spend his junior year in Barcelona. After graduating from Pomona with a degree in international relations, Tim went to work for Oxford University Press. For the past two years he was the publishing editor of Grove Music/Oxford Music Online, a highly regarded resource for music research. This summer he transitioned to a new role in which he manages the computer systems and processes used by editors to track the myriad details involved in commissioning and peer reviewing articles that ultimately appear both online and as part of complex multivolume reference works. In his spare time, Tim sings in the chamber chorus of the New Amsterdam Singers, a choral group with an international reputation. (Coincidentally, the founder of the New Amsterdam Singers, Clara Longstreth, has a WSMS connection too: her children were students

At lunch with Art and Mary after their tour of WSMS, Patricia Luciani, Director of Advancement, asked them what it was like coming back after all these years. Warm smiles crossed their faces as they thought back to shepherding the kids up Riverside Drive on those blustery winter mornings and watching each boy discover his classroom niche—and to finding for themselves connections with other parents and fulfilling ways to volunteer their time and talents. Yes, WSMS is different today, but it is so clearly the same in so many ways.