



Jack, Annabel,
and Charlotte Berney



Faith Cohen Nashell, Jack,
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Jack

Fostering Friendships: One Family's Experiences at WSMS...and Beyond

When our children start out at West Side Montessori School, we have many hopes for them: a warm and nurturing environment, caring and stimulating teachers, good friends who will be both playmates and supporters. We also have hopes for ourselves and our families: we look forward to becoming part of the warm and welcoming WSMS community. A dad brings his three-year-old to school that first day and looks around the classroom, wondering which child is going to bond with his daughter, and which of those impressively attentive parents he'll meet up with for coffee someday. A few short weeks later, a mom watches with delight as her little boy—no longer the baby he seemed so recently—makes independent friendships, just as she has taken the first steps to making some new friends herself.

Jane Pollock and Phil Berney are the parents of three WSMS alumni: Jack ('00), Annabel ('04), and Charlotte ('08). In their years at WSMS the Pollock-Berney family had many opportunities to explore all that makes the school such a great place to begin a life of learning. Jane credits West Side Montessori School with giving each of her children the chance to make enduring friendships and the wherewithal to pursue his or her individual interests in a focused and motivated way.

"WSMS helped them find their voices," Jane asserts. "Their

respective experiences at WSMS helped each one of them to build a foundation that enabled them to become independent thinkers and hard workers."

Jack, now a sophomore at Trinity School, entered 1Wam in 1998. Jane was thrilled to be offered a morning spot; Jack was one of those kids who, at three, still needed an afternoon nap. She soon found that Jack thrived in an environment where he could work with focus on a particular project, while his teachers gently ensured that he was broadly exposed to the wealth of the Montessori curriculum. In particular Jack remembers teachers Marcia Polanco and Melissa Crosby with great fondness, and he loved the science classes with Naomi Stern. Among the students, he found a special affinity with Tanner Morris, Owen Kaye-Kauderer, and Sara Frost, all of whom continue to be among his closest friends. And he went on to flourish at Trinity, where he currently manages to juggle academic achievement, impressive musical talent (singing with the *a cappella* group Sons of Pitches and performing in school musicals), and varsity lacrosse.

The Berney children are evenly spaced four years apart, so each child was able to enter WSMS unencumbered by a sibling in residence. Jack moved on to Trinity in 2000; Annabel started at WSMS in 2002. Even at the age of three Annabel had the poise and self-confidence to interact on a peer basis with adults, and the Montessori classroom—where the teachers are on the floor, face-to-face with the children, mirroring their responses, gently giving feedback, respecting their interests and enthusiasms—was a fertile environment for her. Annabel



Photos: (from left) Annabel, Annabel, Charlotte, Charlotte

loved “being respected as a capable person with good ideas,” such as her approach to making lemonade or her creative self-portrait and poem, which hung outside 3W. Like her brother, she has enduring friendships from WSMS, with Frannie Trousdale and Jesse Morris.

Even before starting at WSMS, Annabel had loved doing puzzles. Noticing the complicated puzzles in Annabel’s first classroom, Jane inquired about simpler ones—only to discover her three-year-old’s intuitive ability to identify the patterns of the cuts and pictures and make the connections. Today, as a sixth grader at Trinity, Annabel uses the challenge of a complex puzzle to “chill out.” Like her brother, she is also an accomplished singer. Her roots as a performer date back to her days at WSMS, where she thrilled her teachers and classmates on her final day of school in 2004 with a heartfelt rendition of “Leaving on a Jet Plane.”

Two years after Annabel moved on to Trinity, Charlotte started at WSMS. The youngest Berney child loved making snacks and getting a turn at being Leader of the Day. She thrived in the classroom’s open-ended, unstructured approach, filling her days writing ideas on scraps of paper—and dreading rest time! Writing continues to be Charlotte’s favorite subject at Trinity, where she is now in second grade. She can often be heard lecturing her older siblings on writing techniques such as “Show it, don’t say it” (implying through description rather than stating outright) and “Said is dead” (eschewing the use of the word “said” in favor of alternative word choices). Asked what she wants to be when she grows up, Charlotte replies that she wants to be a fashion designer...and she looks

forward to creating outfits for her mannequin from the racks at Secondhand Sue!

With all those years in and out of WSMS, Jane and Phil have seen a lot of changes in the school and watched their relationship with the school evolve. Like many WSMS parents with careers on hold, Jane immediately felt welcomed into the WSMS community and quickly found a home for her talents. Among other volunteer commitments, she edited the school’s newsletter and served on the Board of Trustees. Busy today working on a documentary focused on her sister’s experience with metastatic breast cancer (in collaboration with filmmaker and fellow WSMS parent Ricki Stern), Jane also finds time to coordinate Trinity’s Lower School parent tour guides and to serve as a sixth-grade class rep, while Phil has been involved in increasing participation in Trinity’s Annual Fund.

And, like their children, Jane and Phil still enjoy spending time with the great friends *they* made at WSMS—in the classrooms, on the Auction committees, and during shifts at the Spring Fair. The Pollock-Berneys are one of the many families that embody a vital part of WSMS’s mission statement: “Here, children are nurtured [and] families find friendship and support.” The lasting effects of this nurturing, and the longevity of these friendships, are a testament to the school’s commitment to that mission.