

## **ORGANIZATION KIDS, WALDORF SCHOOLS, & COLLEGE ADMISSIONS, by Julie Fredrickson**

*The following is an edited version of a “blog” posted on the website (<http://almostgirl.coffeespoons.org>) of Julie Fredrickson, Shepherd Valley alum and daughter of **Cristina Fredrickson**. Julie was asked to participate in an alumni panel as part of a recent Parent Enrichment Evening at the school. Her participation inspired the following thoughts.*

When I arrived in Boulder, Colorado for spring break my first order of business was an alumni panel at my alma mater, Shepherd Valley Waldorf School. This led me to focus on the differences between Waldorf schools and others, what it meant for me to attend one and how it relates to college admission.

Many new parents are very concerned that their children will be able to compete in the “rat race” of life. For some reason they think that by pushing their kids to the limit the kids will magically transform into high powered executives. One of my favorite pieces on this subject is “The Organization Kid” in the April 2001 issue of Atlantic Monthly. This article suggests that we have a whole new generation of kids who go to soccer, violin, painting, girl scouts, and whatever else, all while doing school and, as they get older, community service. They are essentially building resumes that with enough buffing will get them into college.

But it would seem that this obsession with getting ahead by over scheduling might be coming to a head. Think about it for a moment and ask yourself if all of this running around is actually going to do a thing for these kids. Just from a pragmatic standpoint, how many virtually identical organization kid resumes do the admissions staffs at the Ivies see? Thousands at this point. What makes us think our soccer prima donna is going to be any different from anyone else? Shouldn’t these parents be a little more worried about raising a unique individual?

This for me is where the Waldorf school comes in. Waldorf is still the only educational system I have seen that effectively cultivates both sides of the brain. At traditional schools you get tricked into believing you are either a logical and linear left brain thinker or a creative lateral right brain thinker – either scientific detail oriented people or expansive big picture creative types. But the point is that our brain can do both, we are capable of both seeing the big picture and accounting for all the details. What Waldorf education teaches you is how to do both. You start with the big picture in the younger grades, experiencing every subject. Your curiosity is aroused and each time you encounter a subject you are left wanting more.

As you go through the grades the details start to fit themselves in, so that in addition to a basic picture of gravity and other forces you begin to deal with the details of Newton’s Laws and Classical Mechanics and then move on to more modern lines of thinking with quantum mechanics. But the joy and interest and the big picture excitement of that first encounter stick with you. You are capable of thinking about physics as a whole subject, filled with wonderful, terrible and awesome phenomena, even as you deal with the nitty-gritty of solving complicated equations. Now if you had only encountered the details of physics as most students do for the first time in high school you would either fall in love with the details (though few do) and never think about the whole picture of physics and its consequences, or you would hate the subject

instantly because you have no appreciation of what it means and the details would seem meaningless and confusing.

Now take a typical creative profession like television production. I got one of my internships in television by pushing my whole brain capabilities. Television production absolutely requires that you be a whole brain thinker. To be a producer you need to see in your mind's eye that final product you wish to create. You need to have an appreciation for the mood, tone, emotional, and overall impact you are trying to create. You need to see the big picture before production even starts. You need the kernel of an idea. But in order to bring that idea to fruition you must be able to fill in all the details of the production; the optics of the camera work and the science of the lighting, the basic office details of writing the script, gaining permission, wrangling the talent and crew, keeping an eye on your budget, all while still remaining true to your vision.

Colleges are inundated with hundreds of thousands of upper middle class striver children who have all spent the better part of their school careers prepping themselves to have a solid application. What I think we forget is that virtually everyone applying to college has done the same things. They were all talented regional athletes, good musicians, did plenty of community service, took all the right advanced placement classes and wrote a solid essay. The trick is standing out from the crowd just by being who you are. Now, if soccer really is your passion, then by all means pursue it and go to clubs and camps. If you really want to give back to the community, that's fabulous. But prepping the perfect resume will only make you look like any other "organization kid."

Waldorf education truly believes in the possibility of each child and their ability to understand and handle anything. It brings out the passion in students. For me it helped me to gain a real love of academics and in particular a concern for the human condition. I discovered that the stories of human interaction are what most inspired me. Now I take a line from Plato's Apology as the starting point for my studies: "Who is a knower of such excellence of a human being and a citizen?" This line asks us to consider what it means to be both an individual and a member of the community. We must understand how these ideals conflict and interact, intertwine and diverge.

Which candidate would seem more interesting to an admissions head: the kid who asks the tough questions and follows his own passions; or the kid with the same community service record as every other "organization kid?"