



# News! News! News!

Calvin Hill Day Care and Kitty Lustman-Findling Kindergarten

November 2006

## Autumn Earth Tones, Indoors and Out

### Parent Work Day

Many thanks to all of the parents who came out and got their hands (and knees and elbows) dirty for the first parent work day of the year. The school looks better both inside and out; the new sidewalk is smooth enough to be completely ignored by all those who run across it!



### 'Tis Which Season?

One of the strengths of Calvin Hill is its great cultural diversity and international clientele. This can pose a challenge during the "holiday season," however, as we do not all celebrate the same holidays or even all have holidays during the same season. The staff at Calvin Hill is exploring their approach to holidays. Some of them feel uncomfortable with the ways they have celebrated or not celebrated in the past. Would you – the dedicated and diverse parents at Calvin Hill – be willing to share some of your own culture and ways that you celebrate holidays with us? Your thoughtful involvement could help us to include different cultural heritages in our seasonal activities.

### Jack's Tale: Musings on the Calvin Hill Curriculum

Students on each floor had interesting visitors to school during the month of October. In the kindergarten, Jack O'Lantern and several of his smaller companions joined the class during their field trip to the Greenbrier Greenhouse at Edgerton Park. Weighing in at 40 pounds on the class scale, he fit right in with the other children. Jack had many favorite school activities. For math, he patiently was measured, weighed, and counted in every conceivable fashion. During art, Jack was a remarkably still model while the others examined, drew, colored and carved from many angles. He was a good study for science, offering his seeds for growing and suggesting a new unit about the growth of mold. Jack was a passive but important participant in writing skills exercises, where kindergarten children consolidated their many observations about him into words and sentences. He and his friends also shared their tastes in cooking (see the accompanying recipe). Jack recently left the upstairs classroom to become a full-time member of the gardening staff, where he and his descendants will help to build the fertile soil that nurtures Calvin Hill for many years to come.



*The Threes made a pumpkin scarecrow, guarding the door!*



*The Preschool pumpkin displays mold in the mouth, prompting some outside time...*

### Mark the Date!

November 22-24, 2006 (Wednesday – Friday)  
School closed for Thanksgiving

My observations of the year's harvest pumpkin reminded me of the decision that Kristin and I made a year ago regarding Kindergarten placement for our son. On one particular cold mid-winter day, we visited a classroom in another independent school: there we found some creativity but also many rote activities, and prefabricated decorations on the walls that came straight from a publisher's catalog. When Daniel arrived back at Calvin Hill later that day, the sand/bug table had been filled with fresh snow, and several children were delightedly poking their way through materials provided by their natural world rather than a far-off publisher. What a wonderfully obvious idea, but how few schools think to do it!

Parents of young children have a variety of educational models from which to choose. Many programs place an emphasis on formal reading and arithmetic skills (learned through rote drills), claiming that this will give children a head-start for today's high-pressure world. In contrast, research on child development has consistently emphasized that, in most cases, the quality of children's learning is enhanced by immersion in an integrated environment where aspects of learning are connected in as many ways as possible. I believe that Calvin Hill excels at this type of integrated learning.

The content of the curriculum at Calvin Hill is child-driven, which means that the developing interests of the children determine topics and sometimes methods. All visitors to the school this fall have noticed the fascination with outdoor, autumn-related themes. The preschool students have gone exploring for bugs and worms, made corn collages, used rakes and brooms, and enjoyed art and cooking projects with apples and pumpkins. The kindergarten students have developed sophisticated models using autumn materials (acorns, seeds, nuts, gourds) to explore measurement of size and volume. They measured out one pound of acorns

and used it as a weight for comparison to other objects. They discovered that acorns of a certain size sink, while others float. In the process, they also found that acorns placed in water make a natural dye. This led to experiments with natural dyeing, and the cycle goes on, ignoring artificial "disciplines" in a round of natural, exciting exploration.

The development of problem solving skills and how to get along with other children and adults are just as important to the Calvin Hill community as learning to read and write, and the teachers always have it in mind. At our recent Saturday parent workday, there was conversation about what to do about those messy little stones that form the base of the collector that catches water draining from the roof of the studio. As anyone who visits Calvin Hill soon

notices, those stones are everywhere! But the stones do not arrive "everywhere" without help, and in response to a suggestion to replace them with something less messy, Carla noted "they are an important part of the curriculum."

Through trading and building and counting, those white chunks of marble become a currency of play for all ages at Calvin Hill.

Well, as simple as it seems, those pumpkins and rocks have really deepened my appreciation for the day-to-day learning that takes place at Calvin Hill. I am aware of how hard the staff works to build a curriculum that matches the needs of the children each year – especially because it changes every year! It is a tremendous credit to the staff that they make it look so effortless. As we celebrate the end of the harvest season this Thanksgiving, I give three cheers to Jack and his friends – and to all of the Calvin Hill teachers.

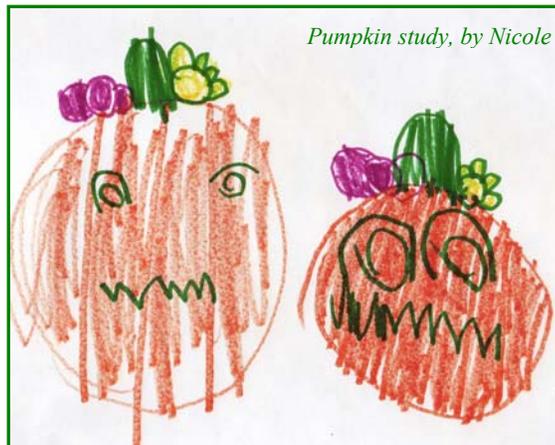
– Author Mikle South is a post-doctoral psychology fellow at the Yale Child Study Center. His affiliation with the

Calvin Hill community began as a student assistant while a Yale undergraduate, and he is currently a member of the board and parent of kindergartener Daniel. He likes to kiss the editor after every new edition.



*The Kindergarten pumpkin joined the gardening staff.*

*A three-year-old child is a being who gets almost as much fun out of a fifty-six dollar set of swings as it does out of finding a small green worm. – Journalist Bill Vaughan*



## Kids in the Kitchen Pumpkin Tea Bread

**M**aking pumpkin bread is a great way to enjoy the fruits of the season! Here's a recipe from the Kindergarten:

2 cups cooked pumpkin  
2 cups sugar  
3 eggs  
1 cup oil  
3 cups flour  
1 teaspoon EACH of cinnamon, nutmeg (or cloves),  
baking powder, baking soda, salt

In large mixing bowl, combine oil and sugar. Mix well. Add pumpkin and eggs. Sift dry ingredients, mix well, and add to liquid batter. Pour into ungreased cake pans. Bake at 350 degrees Fahrenheit until middle of cake springs back when lightly touched or toothpick comes out clean.



*Autumn Study, by Selma*

## New Teacher in the Threes

You may notice a new face on the Threes floor in the coming weeks. Elizabeth Antle will join the staff on November 30 and will shadow Amy Callahan until the start of the winter break, when Amy plans to leave Calvin Hill in anticipation of the birth of her baby in January. Elizabeth is a graduate of New York University and has taught in a young threes classroom for two years. We expect that the overlapping time that Amy and Elizabeth share in the Threes classroom will ensure a seamless transition for everyone. Welcome!



*Kids on the soccer team organized by Calvin Hill parents warm up with Coach Paglia...*

*...and show off their sweet soccer-playing skills!*



## Odds & Ends

- Every year the Parent Committee organizes group holiday gifts for the teachers of each floor. The tradition at Calvin Hill has been to show our appreciation for the teachers during the winter holidays, rather than at the end of the year, and it started because many people wanted to do something for the teachers, but were unsure what to do on their own. The gifts will be presented on the last day of school prior to December vacation. If you would like to participate, please put your contribution in a parent pocket by **Tuesday, December 5:**
  - Threes' Room: Candace Walton (Lily's mom)
  - Preschool: Shannon Callaway Haile (Ian's mom)
  - Kindergarten: Elizabeth Smith (Chloe's mom)
- Participation in the group gifts is strictly voluntary; donations of even small amounts are appreciated.

Please contact [kristin\\_south@yahoo.com](mailto:kristin_south@yahoo.com) with comments or contributions for the newsletter. If I allow my husband to write a long, opinionated article, you are certainly welcome to do the same! Pictures are especially welcome, any time.