

## From the Principal's Pen

February 2021

Submitted by: Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School



I had a little bit of time before I had to head to work the other day. I looked at the clock and I had a spare fifteen minutes by some miracle. I decided to pull out my Valentine's decorations and sprinkle some red and pink hearts around various spots in my house. While I was hanging some little metallic hearts on the tiny birch tree in my dining room, I had a vivid memory of my grandmother's house.

Each winter break in February, when we were small children, we would go to my grandmother's cottage in East Poland, Maine. Her cottage was tiny, heated only with a woodstove, and every winter, she would have the same red oaktag cut-outs of cupid and lots of hearts in various sizes hanging in the windows, facing the driveway, to greet us.

As I was hanging the tiny hearts, one by one, on the branches of my tree, I was imagining my own grandchildren being able to gauge the time of year based on the familiar decorations that would greet them as they arrive at "Gigi and Papa's" house.

If you haven't read the book, *The Last Lecture*, by Randy Pausch, you are really missing something. He writes this book to his students at Carnegie Mellon University when he realizes his cancer is terminal, the final and most meaningful lecture of his life. It is an incredible read. I read it years ago, and reflect back on its content often.

One of the chapters in his book is about his childhood bedroom. He tells about the day his parents allowed him to paint his bedroom. He painted his door as if it was an elevator. He painted a rocket on the wall, among other things, and he wrote the word "hope" in the corner of one of his paintings. Each time he would return home as an adult, his childhood bedroom sat unchanged. He always appreciated that consistency in his everchanging life.

We have a very good friend who lives in New York City. Financially, he has become wildly successful, and has enormous wealth. He owns several homes and a huge apartment in Manhattan; however, when he returns to his childhood home in Fairfield, his bedroom sits unchanged. His mother has maintained his twin bed with his blue plaid bedspread and his little trophies and high school medals still adorn his shelves. His home is his touchstone.

The homes and traditions you are creating today, will become the touchstones of your children's future. What are those things that you consistently have in place for your children? What are the small elements that make your home, your home?

A couple of years ago, I was redecorating the loft in our home. I had purchased some outdoorsy pillows at Marden's on a whim one day and so our loft furniture was dotted with these pillows that had wolves, deer, and foxes on them. In my redecorating frenzy, I replaced all of the pillows with new more "Chip and Joanna" Target pillows. When my grandson arrived for the weekend, he was heartbroken. Where were his wolf pillows that he "loved." I felt terrible that I hadn't taken him into consideration when I changed things up. Three years later, he still reminisces about "his favorite" pillows.

I envy your position in life. Your children are still so young. You have the gift of time to create the wonderful, warm and enduring memories and traditions that your children will return to, both physically and in memory, for the rest of their lives. I still get a warm feeling this time of year when I begin to see the little cardboard boxes filled with

Valentine cards beginning to line the shelves. Do you remember selecting just the right Valentine for each member of your class?

Recently, the elementary principals from all of the district schools got together and decided we needed a plan for Valentine's Day. We weren't willing to bypass this important tradition for children because of the pandemic. Below, you will find the protocol for how we will "operate" Valentine's Day this school year. We are returning to simpler times...just paper cards, no toys or candy or other items....simply the cards. And, we are asking that you have them at school by Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, so we can leave them untouched for a week before the children read them! Traditions matter.

And the traditions don't need to be grand. A few weeks ago, my 30 year old son came home with his fiancée and I had a large pot of spaghetti sauce bubbling on the stove. He mentioned to his future wife that she would "have to get Mom's recipe" for sauce, "she makes the best sauce," he said. As they both ate the spaghetti dinner before them, the question I dreaded came from his sweet girlfriend.

"Oh my gosh, what's your recipe?" I paused before I went to the pantry and returned with a jar of Prego Traditional Sauce. Although I gave away a well-kept secret, I thought, "Well, long after I am gone, my son will think of me whenever he sees a jar of Prego" ....traditions.

Of course we have all been forced to spend more time at home, and that gives all of us more time to think about the little things we do, we display, we hold onto, that makes each child's home their home.

Happy Valentine's Month!

Educationally Yours,

Jennifer McGee

#### **Valentine's Day in the Age of Covid 19!**

We still want to celebrate love and friendship, but in order to still celebrate Valentine's Day this particular school year, we have had to change the rules:

- Valentine's must be brought to school by Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>
- Children will place their Valentine's cards into their friends' containers on that Friday, February 5<sup>th</sup>
- We won't touch the containers until the following Thursday, February 11<sup>th</sup>...and on that Thursday, the children will be able to open their cards from their friends!
  - Valentine's must be paper only....no food items, no toys with them!
    - Please do not send treats from home!
  - Thank you for allowing us to still celebrate this fun occasion...safely!
- If children bring cards after the date of February 5<sup>th</sup> ...we will hold them until after winter break!

No School Dates:

Friday, February 12 is a teacher in-service day, no school for children.

Winter Break: February 15-19