

W I N T E R 2 0 1 1

the

Independent

Oak Park Independent School

Barbara Harrison, Editor

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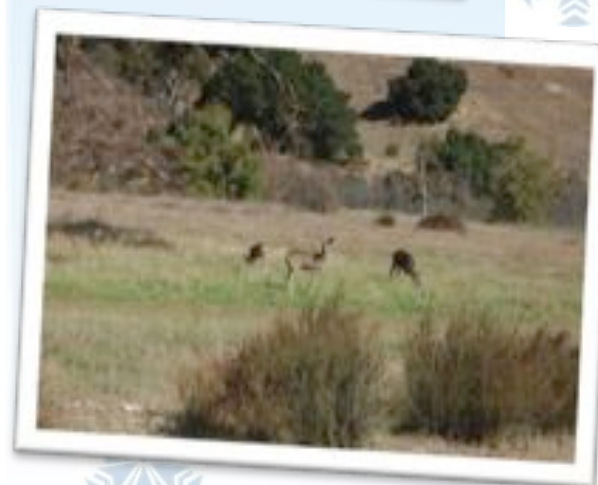


Geocaching at Malibu Creek State Park

OPIS students hit the trails recently at Malibu Creek State Park with GPS devices in hand. Thanks to the behind-the-scenes work of two parents, Terilynn Nygaard and Melanie Prieger, our students were on a treasure hunt to find “caches”. Their clues were latitude and longitude readings downloaded from www.geocaching.com. Our students were divided into 4 teams, each with a few caches to discover.

The day was sunny and hot. We were met in the parking lot by a herd of white-tailed deer. Crossing a creek and scrambling up steep trails was quite an adventure for our students. Some teams were more successful than others at finding their treasures. When a cache was discovered, students were able to take something out as long as they replaced it with something else.

Even those of us who were not successful at finding all the caches enjoyed the beautiful oaks, sycamore trees and other native plants in the Santa Monica Mountains. We imagined what life was like for the Chumash of the area hundreds of years ago. How lucky we are to be so close to such a beautiful area. Even if we didn't find a cache, we certainly found a treasure!



Principal's Message



Greetings and Happy Holidays to all Independent School families. Please enjoy this edition of *The Independent*. I am so proud of the outstanding accomplishments and educational progress among our students. Independent School is truly meeting student needs and providing the opportunity for students to pursue their special interests. Read on and learn about some of our stellar students!

As we close out 2010, I wish all of you a safe and peaceful holiday season. Happy New Year!

Lou Talbome,
Principal

Longtime OPIS parent, Spike Ward, recently published on her blog this essay about her son, Max, and his experience at Oak Park Independent School. With her permission, we have included it here as a testimonial about the benefits our school has to offer to families seeking quality, alternative public education.

OPIS is a very small, publicly funded, independent school, located in Oak Park, a small city adjacent to Thousand Oaks. At the beginning of each new school year, my son is given a stack of textbooks by his new teacher, who will meet with him on a weekly basis to go over the work that he did for the week, and then give him instructions on what he needs to do for the coming week. He takes the standardized spring tests, just like the kids in traditional schools do. His schedule is flexible, leaving him time to pursue other interests, such as college courses (and other classes like his Mandarin lessons, music, etc.), and sleep in. Unlike most teenagers his age, he gets up when he's ready to in the morning, fully alert and ready for the day. He is in charge of his own schedule, taking public transportation most of the time, and is very focused and committed to his education.

The end result: my son has embraced his education as HIS OWN. Unlike the average public school student, school is not something that gets done to him, but something that he is in control of. He is no longer doing time; he is being educated. Last year he started taking community college classes. He loves it because everybody there wants to be there. School is not being done to them. He's successful. He's in charge. Not the LAUSD. Not the UTLA. Not even

us anymore. He is. That's what I really hoped would happen for him after taking this plunge; he would take charge of his own education. I am so very proud of him, and I know, without a doubt, that this story would have had a much different outcome if we had sent him to the neighborhood middle and high schools. He would have gone and done his time, uninspired, with no time after school to pursue Mandarin and astronomy. He'd just be another lost kid in LAUSD.

I'll always be an advocate for public education, but I want to see the whole system torn down and rebuilt. I especially want to see justice for all of the invisible kids of my community who don't have moms like me who'd go to such lengths to make sure they get a great education. But as a parent, I won't be sacrificing my kids at the altar of LAUSD. I won't martyr either one of them for the cause. In order to do right by my son, I needed to get him out of public school. Homeschool was the best thing we could have ever done for him. In the six years that we have been homeschooling, we have never doubted ourselves, or him.

OPIS was the answer for our family. They are currently accepting applications for inter district permits. For more information on OPIS, contact 818-735-3200 or visit www.oakparkusd.org (and select "Oak Park Independent School" in the top left corner of the page).

Welcome, Yoko!



Thanks, Linda!



If you have visited room D-54 lately, you may have been greeted by a new, smiling face. OPIS is pleased to welcome **Yoko Mimori** to the position of Student Services Assistant, a post that was vacated last spring by Jan Mieding.

Yoko was born in Japan and came to the United States as an exchange student when she was 18. After promising her dad she would only be gone a year, she spent two years at the University of Minnesota. Finding the weather too cold, she didn't return to Japan as her family had hoped, but instead transferred to UC Berkeley where she graduated with a degree in Linguistics. Following that, Yoko got her Masters Degree in Linguistics at UCLA and taught Japanese at UC Riverside and UCLA Extension.

It was through one of her students that Yoko met her husband. They currently reside in Westlake and have two children, an eleven-year-old daughter Kelly, and a fourteen-year-old son, Mark. Each summer the family travels to Japan where they visit Yoko's dad and her sister.

Yoko loves to cook and interact with people. She loves being around kids. Recently she served as an Instructional Assistant in Las Virgenes Unified School District.

On weekends you will likely find Yoko at one of her kids' soccer games. But if you'd like to meet her at OPIS, come by Monday – Friday from 9:00 – 12:45. She will greet you with a smile and will be happy to help you with transcripts, enrollment, and a whole host of other issues. We are grateful to Yoko for her enthusiasm, pleasant personality and her expertise in many areas. OPIS is lucky to have Yoko on staff at Oak Park Independent School. We extend to her a very warm welcome.



Thanks, Linda!

Huge thanks are in order for **Linda Roberts**, office manager at Oak View High School. Linda tirelessly took over many of the responsibilities of OPIS before Yoko was hired. She has put in many long hours and has gone above and beyond the call of duty to insure that OPIS would continue to run smoothly. We thank her!



OPIS Yearbooks

2011 Calendar



It's not too late to place an order for the 2010-2011 OPIS Yearbook. Yearbooks will be sold for \$45 through April 1st. Please make a check payable to OPIS and submit it to Yoko Mimori in room D-54. Every student who purchases a yearbook is entitled to submit up to ten photos for his or her own page in the book. Students who do not buy a book are encouraged to submit current photos that will be included in a collage of all the students in the school. Please submit photos on a flash drive or CD that is clearly marked with the student's and teacher's names. These will be returned to you. Seniors are allowed two pages in the yearbook, one of which may be for families to include a letter to their graduate. Depending on the response, we may have two yearbooks, one for grades K-8 and another for high school. Sample yearbooks are on display in each classroom. Don't miss out on this beautiful memory book!

Wednesdays at OPIS



Wednesday is a busy day at OPIS. Academic lab and college counseling with Kate and Gillian are offered in room D-51 for high school students. Middle

school math with Jane is offered in D-53 from 11:00 – 12:00. Barbara teaches Writing Workshop for grades 4 – 8 in room D-54 from 12:00 – 1:30.

January 17 - No School - Martin Luther King, Jr.
January 27 – 1st Semester ends
January 27 – Medieval Times Field Trip
January 28 – No School – Staff Development
February 1, 2 – Sophomore CAHSEE tests
February 7 – School Site Council
February 16 – NBC Studios Tour Field Trip
February 21 – Presidents' Day Holiday
March 1 – Writing Test 4th and 7th Grades
March 14 – School Site Council
March 21 – No School – Staff Development
March 22 – Camarillo Ranch House Field Trip
April 1 – Third Quarter Ends
April 4 – 8 – Spring Break
April 11 – School Site Council
April 19 – Port of Hueneme Field Trip
April 22 – No School
May 2-13 - STAR Testing
May 3 – Open House
May 26 – A Day in Santa Barbara Field Trip
June 9 – 8th Grade Culmination
June 13 – Zuma Beach End-of-Year Party

Life After OPIS

Many people are interested to learn what happens to OPIS graduates.



Here is just a partial list of the schools students have attended upon graduation from OPIS: Georgetown, Stanford, Boston Uni., Pratt, UCLA, UCLA LAW, UCSB, UC San Diego, UC Santa Cruz, BYU, Cal State Channel Islands, Cal State Northridge, San Francisco State, Yale, Sonoma State, Arizona State, University of the Museum –Boston, Occidental College, Oregon State, Uni. of New York at Binghamton, Chapman, Berkley College of Music, Culinary Institute of Calif., Moorpark, Pierce, Santa Barbara City College, Ventura Community College, College of the Canyons, Oxnard Community College, San Diego Community College and Simi Valley Adult School.



Simi Valley Landfill and Recycling Center

Who would have guessed that a place where **2500 TONS** of trash is dumped daily would be a great place to visit? That's what OPIS families discovered on October 14th as they toured the **Simi Valley Landfill and Recycling Center** in the comfort of a plush, air-conditioned bus.

Our enthusiastic guide shared a wealth of information as we bumped across the uneven dirt paths around the ever-expanding landfill. We learned that each person generates an average of 4.5 pounds of trash per day! At the Simi Landfill over 70% of this trash is recycled which is a good thing since some materials can take 500 years to decompose.

The landfill employs 2500 employees and 140 trash trucks, many of which are powered by the methane gas generated by the trash in the landfill. The methane gas also provides power to homes in the area. Each trash truck visits 800-1000 homes per day and makes two to three trips to the landfill each day.

Surprisingly, we detected no bad odors arising from the steaming trash. We learned this is because a wind-activated mister sprays water, a natural deodorant, on the waste. We saw a material called "auto shredder fluff" that is made from ground-up old cars that provides a cover for the trash at night.

Our tour ended with a display of items made from recycled materials and a quiz about what items can be recycled. The students left with a better understanding of the importance of recycling and the technology that is advancing to put our trash to work in creating alternative energy sources.



Aquarium of the Pacific

By Courtney Faggin, grade 4

I had a great time on my first day of home school. I visited the Long Beach Aquarium. I felt the stingrays. They were swimming in a shallow pool. I could reach in and gently touch them with two fingers. They felt like soft fish. I also felt their spines. It was hard down their backs and on their heads.

I learned many things from a chart on the wall. I learned about shark teeth. I learned that otters like to play. I found it interesting that the rays' stingers are trimmed so they won't hurt people.

I saw the sharks swimming in the tank. They were gray and blue. I saw the bonnethead, blacktip reef, zebra, nurse, white-tip reef, fresh water sawfish, sand tiger, and white-spotted bamboo sharks.

The Long Beach Aquarium was fun because I got to feel the stingrays. I learned many things and saw many kinds of sharks.



Nick, Christopher and William enjoyed looking at the sharks and huge ray.



The author, front left, with some of her new friends at the aquarium.



Madison feeds the sharks and rays as Christopher explores the creatures in a touch tank.



Names in the News



Zachary Gordon is back! Not only is he back on the big screen in the sequel to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, but he is back at OPIS.

Zachary gained enormous attention as the title character in the 20th Century Fox film *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, which released in 2010. Zachary began his film career in 2007 when he made his film debut in *Georgia Rule*, starring Jane Fonda, Felicity Huffman, and Lindsay Lohan, and won the Young Artists Award for best supporting actor for his performance.

Since then he has appeared in *National Treasure: Book of Secrets*, and *The Brothers Bloom*, where he played the younger version of Adrien Brody's character. His television appearances include guest-starring roles on *How I Met Your Mother*, *Desperate Housewives*, *24* and *All of Us*.

Zachary also has a busy voiceover career. He is the voice of San San on Nickelodeon's *Ni Hao, Kai-lan*, a voice on Spike TV's Emmy Award-winning *Afro Samurai: Resurrection*, alongside Samuel L. Jackson, and is the voice of "Young Bruce Wayne" for Cartoon Network's *Batman: The Brave and the Bold*. Currently he is the voice of Gil in Nickelodeon's *Bubble Guppies*. Additionally, Zach has worked on Seth Green's *Robot Chicken*, voicing Charlie Brown, Linus and Franklin. He will be featured as the voice of Papi Jr. in the upcoming movie, *Beverly Hills Chihuahua 2*. Zachary was recently named this year's Variety's Power of Youth Honoree.

Additionally, while filming *Diary of a Wimpy Kid 2*, he received the Rising Star Award at the Danville Children's Film Festival. He will soon be honored at the USA Film Festival in Dallas, TX. In his spare time, Zachary enjoys basketball, roller-skating, ping-pong and sixties music, especially The Beatles. And, on top of his unbelievably demanding schedule, he manages to keep up with his schoolwork at OPIS!



Tennis Star, Sangeet Sridhar

By Sharmilla Sridhar



Sangeet had one of his best tennis seasons yet, in 2010. He started the summer by winning the 108th So Cal Sectional Junior Championships in Fountain Valley, CA, entering as the 8th seed in the Boy's 10s. He then won the Little Mo Sectionals in San Diego, and the Little Mo Regionals in San Francisco, contending well with both fatigue and bad weather conditions. He was among the youngest players to be invited to the Pacific Zonal Championship (12s) in Tucson, AZ. He surprised himself with a record of 9-1 against top players in the nation. This certainly boosted his confidence for the rest of the season. In the fall, he won the Little Mo Nationals Championship in Austin, TX competing well against his peers in the 10s from all over the country. He also managed to see the Capitol while in Austin. He continued his success in the So Cal Doubles Sectionals in November, winning both in the Boys 10s doubles and mixed divisions, completing a rare "Triple Crown" (winning singles, doubles and mixed in the same age division in the same year). This accomplishment will be recognized by the USTA in a special banquet in June 2011. He continues to train hard and improve all aspects of his game.



Names in the News

William McIntyre Stars in Local Production

By Jennifer McIntyre

It seems to be a traditional telling of *The Three Little Pigs*: three pigs, three houses, one big bad wolf. At least that's the intent of the first narrator. But the second narrator seems to be getting her stories confused and brings in a house of candy, along with a blind witch, as well as some random wise-cracking birds. And to further complicate matters, the story is interrupted by the unwanted appearances of a fire marshal, a health inspector and a dentist general! It isn't long before this classic story is way out of whack. The narrators, however, will do everything they can to bring it back to the version everyone knows and loves.

The Malibu Stage Company gave audiences a glimpse into this unstable stable on December 11 and 12 as several young members of the Young ACTors Project presented *The Three Fractured Pigs*. OPIS's very own 5th grader, **William McIntyre**, commanded the audience in his role of 'Dentist General'.

Performing live theatre has been a passion for William as he has been with several productions in the Malibu area including *The Nutcracker* and *Robin Hood*. Winter classes start on January 10th and William would love it if you would join the troupe and be a part of the show! For more details, call 310-447-8245.



Ashley Goldman to Compete in National Judges Gymnastics Championships

By Michele Goldman



After receiving a rank among the highest scores and winning three medals at a gymnastics competition on December 12, 2010, twelve-year-old Ashley Goldman qualified to compete at the official and prestigious Level 7 State Team Challenge being held in conjunction with the 21st annual National Judges Cup Gymnastics Championships in Phoenix, Arizona on Saturday, January 8, 2011.

This competition was created especially for the National Judges Cup and has become one of the premiere sessions of the competition. Level 7 gymnasts in teams of six members representing their respective state compete for the title of Level 7 State Team Challenge Champion. Up to twenty states have been represented at past National Judges Cups and this number continues to grow.

Ashley is thrilled at the prospect of representing California in this important event. We wish her great success!

