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Canadian Association of Montessori Teachers

Canadian Association of Montessori Teachers

October 2014

Message from the President

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My term as President of CAMT is soon over and though I will miss it, I leave CAMT in exceedingly fine hands. I have no regrets and a great number of wonderful memories: of workshops, of conferences, of conversations, and most importantly, of strangers becoming friends.

CAMT has a new set of by-laws. It has direction. It has steady hands at the wheel. It still needs you, the members, to keep it alive and vibrant. Don't let it down. Become more involved. Give it your vision, time and your help. CAMT can become even greater.

Thank you to the present members of the board and to all those with whom I have had the privilege of serving with. It has always been interesting even when it was difficult. It was always worthwhile. You are terrific people and I wish you all of the very best.

Thank you to the Association Manager: Carol Ford. You took on so much more than you contracted for and I think you came to love us even when we made you crazy.

Thank you to our Conference Manager: Lynn Kaczmarczyk. You held us together when we almost disappeared and never lost faith.

Thank you to the members of CAMT who came to the workshops and conferences and shared their love and their ideas and made CAMT better every year.

Thank you to CCMA for your friendship and assistance along the way. You are proof that professional courtesy matters.

Please wish me well as I move on towards new challenges but rest assured that I will still be part of CAMT.

See you in the sandbox.

Barton Graff, President

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Remembering Audrey Sillick December 21 1929—July 16 2014



Remembering Audrey by Claudia Langlois

This year the Montessori community lost one of Canada's great Montessorians of the 21st century. There is a history about Audrey Sillick, as a Montessorian, a Naturalist and a Christian that a few Montessorians know about, yet many do not. Audrey Sillick was born outside of Calcutta during the 1920s and lived there for 25 years. During her time in India, Audrey developed an awareness of nature. She believes that Hinduism played a very strong role in developing her appreciation for nature as the natural world was a part of everything that she saw and did.

After World War II, Audrey immigrated to Canada and married in Toronto. In Toronto, Audrey began her teaching career and in 1971 she was the Founder and Director Emeritus of the Toronto Montessori Teacher Training Institute, now known as TMI. Audrey also promoted movement and music in children. She was co-author for Musikgarten which focuses on child development, music education and environmental awareness. Audrey also believed in preserving the environment and its inhabitants. She became an internationally known writer and speaker.

This summary gives us an indication that Audrey did a lot in her time, yet it doesn't let us know her or understand her passion for what she did. It is within this issue of CAMT, and perhaps others that we have requested fellow Montessorians to write memoirs about Audrey Sillick, so that we can become aware of the woman she was. Through CAMT she was acknowledged as a life time member for her dedicated work to Montessori. Through her co-workers, friends and care givers she was a spectacular woman, one of a kind, I have come to understand and it is hoped that you will enjoy reading about and cherish the work that one woman did for Montessori in Canada.

A Personal Reflection by Diane de Frietas

I first met Audrey many years ago when I was hired to teach with her at TMS, having just graduated from MMTO in London, England. Though I had taught before, this new approach to Education filled me with uncertainty and trepidation as I was about to put the Montessori theory into practice for the first time. It was my only hope that I would be mentored by someone who would be patient with me, and empathetic to my lack of experience in a Montessori class. Imagine my first meeting with Audrey - I was paralyzed with doubt and fear. Her calm, quiet, soft-spoken, humble demeanour was in total opposite to mine. I panicked and wished for a transfer, only to be told that I had the luck of the draw as Mrs. Sillick was the most knowledgeable, experienced, dedicated Montessorian this side of the ocean. As a recent graduate I wanted support and wondered if someone so experienced could be that supportive. Within days I knew I was in safe hands for beneath that quiet facade a strong, confident, no-nonsense, deeply spiritual person was revealed. While mentoring me every step of the way, she allowed me to be myself, secretly cringing, I am sure, every time I forgot to tuck in a chair or speak in a quiet voice.

The precision and exactness she brought to the Practical Life Exercises were second to none and this coordination was still evident as I witnessed her cut and serve her 90th birthday cake years later - not a crumb was spilt. Her love of music came through her work with the "Kindermusik" programme and to this day whenever I hear the song "Button up your overcoat" I remember her singing in the coatroom as she helped the Casa students get dressed for those cold winter recesses. She understood the Language and Math curricula in every detail and the Sensorial materials were her keys to the universe that she loved so much. She was dedicated to nurturing a love of nature and respect for the environment through all that she taught and did.

During our time together we would have many a debate / discussion on every topic imaginable but it seemed always to be through the lens of respect - respect for the child or respect for the environment. She was an amazing story teller and I would be fasci-

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Remembering Audrey Sillick December 21 1929—July 16 2014 (continued)

nated observing her as she engaged her students with her nature stories. I enjoyed her dramatic delivery and dry sense of humour, but she was the funniest when she wasn't even trying to be.

When Audrey began the teachers' training at TMI she brought her expertise as a practitioner to her adult students who benefitted immensely from her practical experience of being a true teacher and not being just a technician. Her honest and insightful assessment of their work guided them to become the very best of teachers that were hired in our schools. Her loyalty and commitment to the founder and principal of TMS, Helma Trass, developed into a friendship of mutual support and respect throughout her days.

Audrey was able to walk into a class, fade into the woodwork and within minutes sense the authenticity of the classroom. Her quiet powers of observation and feedback encouraged you to see yourself and your class often from a different perspective.

One would only have to mention the name Audrey Sillick to the many colleagues, friends and students and a smile or a story would be shared. Those memories and stories we have are of a unique individual, a one-of-a-kind person that lived the Montessori principles of respect for the child and the world in which we live. She will remain in our hearts and in this way will be in every child with whom we have shared the beauty of nature as given to us through her loving eyes.

Memories of Audrey *By Fari Afshar (Mahtani)*

When I first arrived in Toronto in 1968 to work at TMS Mrs Trass had employed me, even then Audrey Sillick's presence filled us with awe. She was our mentor and our inspiration.

When I glanced at the CAMT email, I thought she was coming to give a presentation!! That is how ageless she is to many of us, who have known her!

Audrey is a Montessorian we will always cherish. She was a true idealist! Let us Build a monument in her name.

With deep condolences to everyone in the Montessori community.

A Tribute To Audrey *by Wendy Agnew*

I went to Audrey's memorial service in July - Audrey Sillick, the woman who made me. It's odd to think of someone in such a way I suppose, but there are people in one's life who take on the role of spiritual sculptor, or philosophical potter, or metaphysical moulder. Audrey was one of these. The first day we met in her class at Old Vic at the U of T, she said in stentorian tones, "I don't have to like you, but I have to love you." That phrase launched me on my Montessori journey. The quality of "love" changed in my mind and heart from that moment.

As Audrey explained - love is seeing into the needs and potentials of the human spirit and responding to the call. Audrey listened, she observed, she took the time to sense the nuances of situations and act from a meta perspective to nurture and enhance a bigger picture. Often she would ask, after a pause filled with quest, "What do you think Wendy?" And in that moment of focus (hers) I would be compelled to look into a part of myself previously obscured but made suddenly visible by the light of her attention.

Every class was a symphony of Montessori theory and practice with eclectic variations from illustrious psychologists, scientists, ecologists, and philosophers. Audrey made Montessori a portal to a larger world, - a world of activism and vocation that embraced children, society, and planet. I became sensitized that year, in 1979, to the power of one to change the world, and to the potential of following the children, the playful architects of tomorrow, into an evolving and hopeful reality. - A reality equally intimate with the holy humble and the variant vast, the glorious general and the serried specific.

Audrey once told me, "We live in the being of our four billion year old mentor, the earth. Remember that and you can't go wrong."

I can't believe she's gone, that brave and feisty advocate of children, of nature, of future. But perhaps that is the magic of being a sculptor of hearts and souls and minds ... Audrey's legacy for me, and I'm sure for many others, is a gentle and durable immortality that warms and enlivens the small, still voice within and reaches beyond the sense of personal loss and into a vibrant hope for the future.

Inside/Outside: Achieving Balance and Authenticity in the Classroom, at Home and In Between

Prior to summer's end we had the opportunity of speaking to a group of dynamic Montessori teachers who participated in a workshop that covered the value of 'Achieving Balance & Authenticity Inside and Outside of the Classroom.'

It became clear by the end of the day that in order to be our best, whether it benefits our children inside the class or at home, our family, friends, co-workers and our community at large, we need to be true to ourselves first and foremost. To do so, we must prioritize our own self-care. For any of us to be the most effective as a teacher, parent, partner, colleague and/or in every area of our life we must look after ourselves first. It is also the best way to set examples for the children who watch us, for if we do not care for ourselves, how can we teach them to care for themselves in the long run?

This is not an easy feat. To do so takes organization, discipline and focus. Within our workshop we used and taught a number of tools to the participants to

continue to use for themselves and with their students and anyone else they wish to share them with. Some of these easy to use tools are: 'The Learning State', Values, Strengths, a personalized version of The Pink Tower, Wheel of Self Care, Gratitude Journal, and many others...which we would love to share with you at future workshops!!

Our goal (and yours) is for you to regularly allot time for 'self' in order to tap into your authenticity, celebrate transparency and thrive in your relationships inside and outside of the classroom.

So rejoice in your authenticity! Practice self care daily!

You will then notice the positive response from the children, your family, peers and all those around you!!

Wishing you a wonderful year.

Evelyn Buchbinder and Carolyn Swirsky

What's On Your Bookshelf? *By Katrina Mosscrop*

As Montessori teachers, we have back-to-school traditions and routines, including recommended reading for new parents and team-building activities for new students. What resources have been invaluable for your teaching practice? I have listed a few resources that I refer to each year and have proved helpful for creating a common language that parents, students and teachers can use to foster cooperative relationships inside and outside of the classroom.

The 7 Habits of Happy Kids by Sean Covey
A collection of short stories that illustrate seven prosocial behaviours including: be proactive; begin with the end in mind; put first things first; think win-win; seek first to understand, then be understood; and synergize. At the end of each story, Covey has suggested discussion questions. Check out his website for more resources: www.theleaderinme.org.

Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids by Carol McCloud and David Messing

A short story about how children can influence others (even themselves!) in positive and negative

ways. It establishes an easy to use language for destructive and disruptive behaviours by assigning everyone a figurative bucket that can be filled up when we are happy and spilled when we are sad or embarrassed. For example, when you laugh at someone who tripped, you take from their bucket and your bucket.

How Full is Your Bucket? For Kids By Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer

Another bucket book! This short picture book gives more concrete examples to which students relate and understand.

Montessori Madness by Trevor Eissler

I always try to provide parents with works by Dr. Maria Montessori but they can be overwhelming because of the language she uses and length of the volumes. Eissler writes an incredibly accessible anecdotal book about his experience as a Montessori parent including interviews with other parents, students and teachers. It is funny and easy to read. Check out his website www.montessorimadnes.com for two engaging videos about Montessori education.

Walking the Grounds that Dr Maria Montessori Once Did by Nandita Agarwala

Recently one of CAMT's Board members, Nandita Agarwala, travelled across the ocean with the hopes of retracing Dr. Montessori's footsteps through the past. Here is the first entry in a short mini-series that we will be featuring over the next few newsletters. Enjoy.

It was late at night and I was surfing the net. I came upon a letter written by Mahatma Gandhi to Dr. Maria Montessori in which he talked about her philosophy and commended her. Mahatma Gandhi had spoken at the Montessori Training Centre in London in 1931 and had had a conversation with Dr. Montessori. He also asked Dr. Montessori to come to India and spread her teachings. Dr. Montessori had commended him on his ideology and his doctrine of Ahimsa. It was then that I started thinking about the commonalities between the two ideologies. I had completed my Lower Elementary training many years ago and was familiar with the Cosmic Peace curriculum. Dr. Montessori wrote about the oneness of all beings. This was something that was taught in Hindu scriptures so how could Dr. Montessori have come to this conclusion? I started thinking about this more and more and kept searching for more and more answers and realized that in order to find my answers I need to go to the place where it all took place ... India. I started searching for institutes, people and literature that could help give me some answers. I started planning a trip to India. It was quite a long three weeks (prior my departure) as I stayed up at nights to speak to people in India (the time difference is 11.5 hours in winter)! They were great, very helpful and I could feel that many of them shared the same excitement as myself. I organized my trip in three weeks and before I knew it, was on my way to the airport.

My trip to India was eventful to say the least.

I reached Pearson International Airport to board the flight and realized that I was carrying around 'too much weight' as it would seem. This made me the butt of my family's joke as they had warned me not to pack too much but who was listening? No, not me. This was my first trip to India in three years and I have a lot of friends and family. I had to take gifts for everyone!

Anyway, after paying for the excess weight, I ran to the gates, only to realize that I had reached the wrong gate number and my boarding gate was on the opposite side. I ran for my life (flight). I reached the correct gate, panting and huffing (for those who don't know me, I am not the athletic type at all) and I was sure that I was having a cardiac arrest. The attendants at the gate told me that the flight was about to take off and that they had announced my name many times. The gates were now closed! I was horrified. Here goes my chance of going on this trip and doing all the great things I had planned. I pleaded with them and they said that if my luggage had been off loaded, there was nothing that could be done. I prayed hard to all my numerous Gods and promised all good things. My prayers were answered. They let me in. I was thrilled, though only for a short time. I entered the flight and met the eyes of all the hundreds of passengers giving me the 'glare'. I looked sheepish and kept my head down till I reached my seat. I touched down at Mumbai and it was all good thereafter.

I was busy getting ready for my interview with Hamsaji Ghorpade. She is one of the few surviving students of Dr. Montessori who was trained by her. Later, I came to know that there are two more students still surviving but not in great health and have lost the ability to remember things.

I was excited that I was going to meet Hamsaji, who resides in Bangalore, India. I was escorted to meet her by another colleague of hers and he stayed for a while after which he left. The moment I met Hamsaji, it felt a little eerie (to say the least). Here was a person, who had met, trained, talked to and felt the presence of Dr. Montessori herself! We exchanged niceties, I told her the purpose of my visit and we sat down for a long chat after I handed her the 'Lifetime Honorary Membership of CAMT' certificate. She informed me that she was the youngest student of Dr. Montessori in that batch of trainees and she took the course at the age of 18 years.

It was interesting to talk to Hamsaji, as she gave me an insight to the Montessori movement in India in those days. She kept referring to the philosophy of the method and also talked about how the materials were of lesser consequence in regards to the

The Wild Curriculum—by Dr. Wendy Agnew

The land is where our roots are. The children must be taught to feel and live in harmony with the earth. - Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952)

The World Wildlife Fund's recent announcement that 52% of the earth's wild animals have disappeared in the last 40 years must give us pause. Although the methods for the study have been contested, biologists agree that planetary biodiversity is declining at a fearsome rate. The culprits are habitat loss, unsustainable hunting and fishing practices, and climate change. What can we do?

As Montessorians, we are fortunate to work in a structure that is based on natural, adaptive systems, promotes freedom with responsibility, diversity, interdependence, inclusivity, and peace. We are not struggling against a factory model that is endemic to a plethora of global problems. However, if Maria Montessori were alive today, what would she have to say? I suspect, that she would urge us to nudge the boundaries of our experience and our consciousness and "go out" ... go farther out ... so the children are able to nurture that innate appreciation and empathy for wild systems that is their birthright.

What is the nature of nature? ~ The logic of the elegant wild? ~ The auto-telic impulse that engenders evolution, sustainability, future? What resonates at the fertile interface of education and survival?

We can create a beautiful prepared environment for our students and yet, if we don't include cross-species interaction, the feel of the land, a commitment to places that are not manicured and managed, our children will lose a sense of the encompassing earth. They will become increasingly domesticated, tamed, programmed. And perhaps that is why our wilderness and its magnificent creatures are dying. On the continuum of human experience, is childhood also becoming an endangered species?

I was lucky enough to go to the Hershey Farm School¹ a few years ago for N.A.M.T.A.'s Orientation to Adolescent Studies. The faculty mentioned that in the beginning, children suffered a period of withdrawal from the glut of 'stuff' that is integral to most contemporary western lives. Sometimes a month would pass in which students were restless for, and craving cell phones, games, screens, quick fixes with addiction-like symptoms ... And then, with the immersion into working with the land in projects that ranged from pond management, to building simulated historical structures, to milking cows and archaeological explorations, a peace descended. A healing took place, perhaps from the ravages of "nature deficit disorder" that Richard Louv describes in his book "The Last Child in the Woods."²

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Walking on the Grounds that Maria Montessori Once Did *(continued from page 5)*

philosophy. She said that Dr. Montessori always told her students to improvise and use materials and objects found in the surrounding (This made sense considering the situation that India was in and the lack of resources in the villages and towns). For example, she talked about using shells and match sticks instead of counters while counting.

I kept on talking to her and lost track of time. She informed me about Kalakshetra and her involvement with it. But the highlight of my meeting with Hamsaji was when I asked her, "What was Dr. Montessori like in person?" Hamsaji looked me

straight in the eye and said, "She was graceful and beautiful (pause) just like you". I never questioned her eyesight but soaked up those words as they were the highlight of my entire trip.

Learn more about Nandita's journey in India in the next issue, along with highlights from our November Conference.

Wild Curriculum (*continued from page 6*)

If we don't take time to make space for children in the wild, we are creating a vacuum in the psyche of humanity. The answer is not primarily found in 'book knowledge', but in visceral, sensorial experiences of being human within the family of earth. For this shift to happen, small changes are enough. Take time to watch the clouds; to plant a garden; to devote a shelf to natural forms; to sketch outside; to go for walks; to create relationships with secret urban wildernesses; to move like animals; to observe and serve the natural world.

Janine Benyus, the author of *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*, sites "quieting"³ as a first step to 'emergent learning' or learning that arises from a spontaneous collaboration of place, circumstance, and community engaging the whole child and resulting in the growth of collective consciousness. Marion Woodman and V.S. Ramachandra have written eloquently on the power of art to 'recover essence and amplify it'⁴ thereby establishing a physiological and psychological link that builds not only meaning, but also identity.⁵ Montessori realized that thematic learning and the elegance of a spiral curriculum that builds complexity around a simple core was akin to living structures of mind and matter. Ours is a wild curriculum, in the best sense of the word; Where knowledge waits patiently in a rich undergrowth of potential; Where surprise, freedom, and response are delicately honed through choice, collaboration, and nurture; Where the human spirit may work in harmony with, and within its 4 billion year old mentor.

Small acts can lead to a change of awareness that the world is not only alive, but a profound extension of ourselves. To understand that forests, rivers, lakes, oceans, deserts, mountain ranges, even urban 'waste' lands exist in a dynamic integrity lifts them beyond mere 'resources' and into complex adaptive systems with a potential for sharing codes of rights and ethics. The financial implications of this shift in consciousness are potent and potentially frightening to systems that regularly exploit nature to feed a rapacious appetite for commodities. It has been calculated that countries with the highest standard of living would need from 3 to 5 earths to support their/our appetites.⁶ And yet, the measure of happiness and fulfillment does not necessarily correlate with a high income.⁷ Realizing this, the tiny country of

Bhutan took the radical step of redesigning itself based not on Gross Domestic Product, but Gross National Happiness as its main developmental indicator. It is working to radically affect systemic change at all levels of government, including education.

Change is coming, but back to the question – What do we do? Find the wild within, feel the silence, engage in quieting, honour the small creatures and the large that help define us, allow the children to lead us into a future that sings, snarls, chirps, ambles, crawls, and flies. Replace wants with needs, replace fear with hope and passive with active.

For teachers, there are many ways forward, from the pedestrian - changing where to shop and what (or if) to buy, to saving rainwater and composting, to political action, to partnering with a holistic farm, to adopting a few acres of rainforest, but perhaps it is that silent interface between self and world that is the most potent threshold for change. As educators, may we become artful at finding that place where our myriad internal selves can fuse with the extended self of world to create a diversity of wills that nourishes the mirroring biodiversity of future.

Children are our ecologists and we are their conduits. In promoting moments of relationship with the natural world, and facilitating its language we plant the seeds...

"Birds ...

Chirp softer than the flowers ...
They eat petit like the sun
They never stop chirping
'Til the sun goes to the bottom of
the earth." – by S (aged 6)

As the land goes – so goes man.

J. Darling (1876 – 1962)

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Parent education is a crucial part of building any school community. Too often teachers and principals work hard to organize and host a parent ed night ... only to realize a less than stellar turn out of an audience. Below I share some tips on how to bolster parent turn out, and build stronger relationships between home and school in doing so.

Don't Talk About Montessori: That's right, don't talk about Montessori...directly. At the end of a long day, in the middle of their busy lives, the last thing any parent wants to do is go to a lecture about the beauty to be found in all 87 steps of Washing a Table. They want to someone to tell them how to make their lives just a little bit easier.

Talk about issues that pertain to all families, not just families enrolled at your school. Tell them how to make bedtime run more smoothly. Tell them how to involve their kids in more peaceful mealtimes. Tell them how to download responsibilities of household chores to their littles; and use Montessori principles to explain each step.

In this way you are absolutely offering more information about Montessori education, but in a way that is far more user-friendly, far more applicable to their daily lives, and will attract far more people than if you always cycle through the Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Math nights.

Keep doing the same old thing, and you will continue to attract the same group of 12 people who "haven't heard that one" yet. Use your monthly newsletter, Facebook page, or Twitter feed to highlight classroom materials one at a time, with photos of real children using them, and inform parents of the pedagogy directly in small bytes.

Timing is everything: You have to be very strategic in your parent ed night planning. If you pick a time that allows parent to go home from work first, you have lost them to the world of dinner/bath/bed routines...and sweat pants. Once people get home, they are not going to make the effort to go back out, especially if it's winter. Or raining. Or nice out.

You have to make your nights as accessible and convenient as possible: get rid of the small chairs. If you are inviting adults into your space, take their comfort into consideration and provide age appropriate seating. Offer childcare and spare them the hassle of finding a babysitter. Provide warm and inviting food like out-of-the-oven appetizers...bonus points if you can serve wine.

Suddenly this has turned out to be a pretty nice and relaxed evening in which their kids are taken care of, and they're sitting back and enjoying the company of other parents in an inviting and social environment. Now they feel more relaxed and more apt to receive the information you are presenting, and probably more comfortable opening up to you about their concerns.

So often teachers only interact with parents when there is a problem...this is your chance to shine in a non threatening place, have a laugh, and get to know one another. Everybody wins.

Think Outside the Parent Ed Night: Schools mostly stick to parent education as a formal evening, two to three times a year. There are more ways to get parents into the school than just hosting an evening every few months. Further, even if you are providing a relaxed and social environment, sometimes it still feels like pulling teeth to get parents to come in for more information. Your secret weapon? Involve the children.

Parents weaken at the opportunity to see their baby in action. Start hosting regular and child-lead open houses in the weeks leading up to parent-teacher conferences to give them a chance to see the classroom live and in person. This allows them to experience the lessons hands-on from their child-turned-teacher. Kids love it, and parents are usually blown away by what their child is actually favouriting during the day.

Another option is to stick with the evening model, but switch up your speaker line up: most people are uncomfortable with public speaking and have a hard time getting the right message across. Consider hiring a professional: someone who works in education, health/nutrition, child wellness...anyone with whom you are comfortable will stay "on point" with your school's values, but who delivers group lectures for a living. When parents have the chance to talk to "an expert" in one area of their child's development, they tend to take the message more seriously...even if it's the same one you've been giving all along. Sometimes it just takes the switch up to make the difference. The questions they ask in this scenario will also give you more insight as to what's really going on with their perception of their child's day to day life.

So there you have it. A huge part of operating a successful Montessori school is building and fostering solid relationships between home and school, particularly with the recent roll out of full day kindergarten. You want to make those relationships last so families think twice about withdrawing.

Like any relationship, this takes work, but in a similar spirit, is worth the effort.

Leisse Wilcox is a mum of twins + one, parenting writer, former Montessori teacher, and parent educator. She is the creator of the blog Eat Play Love, and is a regular contributor to Durham Parent magazine, The Northumberland News, and the online lifestyle community So Fawned. Her work can be found online via www.leisewilcox.com/blog, www.sofawned.com, or on Instagram and Twitter @LeisseWilcox. For more information on inviting Leisse to your school as a keynote speaker contact leisse
