

February 2008

This update is way too long, but I couldn't figure out what to cut out so see the handy-dandy underlining of key words, cleverly designed to help you with the skimming necessary in these speedy times we live in.

There will be no debate surrounding how I should begin our first update of 2008: announcing the arrival just days ago (January 28th at 9:21 PM to be exact) of Anna Derya Cezik to our Programs Director Norma Andrade and her husband Tolga Cezik... our first brand new staff baby (although certainly not our last... more on that from Alex in July). The grandmothers have arrived from Istanbul and the Bronx, the 826 Seattle team of staff and volunteers pooled their money for months of diaper service (not to mention a knit hat and mittens custom made by Justin), and we are full of the warmest congratulations and excitement.

Clearly any baby born into our environment will be prone to immediate space travel. Hence a special product line is quickly being created to ready our staff babies (and any others with the same ilk). Keep your eyes peeled in the Greenwood Space Travel Supply Co. for our soon-to-be-revealed Li'l Baby Sputnik line of space leisure wear and comfort products, specially designed with the intrepid infant space traveler in mind.

But before we get too carried away with the future, let me tell you about what has been happening at 826 Seattle in the past couple of months.

In early January, we had our first Hamilton Middle School publishing party to mark the publication of *This One Time*, a wonderful collection of stories written by a group of 6th graders. This book is a must for any self-respecting reader's bookshelf (and available for purchase at our store). We've had fifteen tutors at Hamilton this entire fall helping Hamilton teachers Chris Davis and Wendy Chapman with writing projects. Book two will be out later this spring.

Remember the December update where I asked for gifts for our staff? What a great response we received. Here's how you readers responded:

- Alex got her Quickbooks update
- Justin got \$200 towards his store upgrades
- Toffer got \$100 towards his drop-in tutoring mailboxes
- Norma got her video camera and not one, but TWO, digital cameras for field trips. (We always wanted two and right when the second one arrived, the old one we'd been using since we started promptly broke. Apparently word travels fast in the digital camera community.)

The gift for me was the satisfaction of knowing it was a great idea and also the warm feeling that people actually read to the very end of these updates, which, I've already admitted, are really by all conventional wisdom, way too long.

Another wonderful thing that happened in December was our first ever drop-in family potluck. Parents often ask how they can thank the volunteers, so we decided to stage a potluck. We invited folks to bring in a family recipe that could help us celebrate the multicultural richness of our student population. We had no idea if anyone would really show up. But they did — in droves. We had Ethiopian stew and sushi from Japan and flan and posole from Mexico and lots of yummy food I couldn't pin on one country. Then Damtew Assefa (Michiyas and Melat's father) walked in with a giant cake with this message emblazoned in frosting: "Thank you to all the 826 Seattle tutors." One brilliant Ethiopian family brought boxes of pizza early (can we call pizza really a truly international food?), so all the kids filled up quickly on that while the rest of us (with more refined palates) could enjoy the worldwide cuisine that filled the rest of the tables. Moms, dads, uncles, aunts, cousins, and maybe a neighbor or two (but thank God not the fire marshal) showed up. It was completely fun, and next year we'll be renting a gymnasium!

Speaking of volunteers, we have done a recent informal survey amongst our drop-in students and were not surprised to find that two of the most popular tutors are Peter and Bill. These

guys, in addition to being wonderful tutors and all around good guys, have another thing in common. They are both retired. This brings me to mention that the rumor that 826 Seattle has tons of volunteers is true BUT we are always a bit short of daytime volunteers. So if you happen to be, perhaps, recently retired and have a yen to help some very worthy children one or two days a week with their homework, we would be happy to roll out the red carpet. Is it coincidental that both Bill and Peter are retired and popular, or is there something special about the sage wisdom that emanates from them that so inspires the 9 year olds? We don't know. We have also noticed that retired folks don't tend to get new jobs and leave us or go to graduate school with the same frequency as our younger volunteers ... another good thing from our perspective. We prize consistency, and our students love seeing the same folks on days they can count on.

Thanks to Jered Gallegos (husband of our beloved former John Marshall contact teacher Audra Gallegos), who worked over the holidays (with a team of painting volunteers) to complete phase one of The Remodel. Yes, it's true. I am here to announce that our toilets no longer wobble, the red room is no longer red, there is actually a picture window between the back office and the red room (that's no longer red), and, thanks to the aesthetic leanings of our youth advisory board, our bathrooms now virtually hum with a quasi-sherbet-orange color in one and a seafoamish green in the other. I feel like I've gone to the Caribbean every time I pay a visit. We would especially like to thank Neptune Coffee for letting us use their restrooms (without even a purchase) for the two days it took to get our new toilets in. This may seem like a small thing, because it was over the holidays when there were no students, but bear in mind, at that time 50% of our staff (i.e., Norma and Alex) were pregnant. (As opposed to now, when only 25% of our staff (Alex) is pregnant.) I wondered why they both paled when I told them we'd be out of working toilets for a couple of days.

On January 18th, we all put on our best duds, piled into our cars, and headed down to Seattle Center's Intiman Theater where we, along nine teachers and education programs, were the proud recipients of this year's Golden Apple Award. Students, staff, and volunteers came to cheer me on as I accepted the award on our behalf. What can I say? We are so honored to be acknowledged for the work we do after only 2+ years in operation and to share the stage with some extraordinary educators. You can watch the awards on February 21 at 8:00 PM on KCTS (channel nine).

Another recipient of the award was the Bright Future program and its founder, Reza Khastou. This is a program that helps high school students get vocational training while earning credit towards graduation and receiving case management into their futures. Small world that it is, Audra Gallegos (mentioned above as former John Marshall teacher and wife of our carpenter hero Jered) is now working for Bright Future. At the awards ceremony, I said to Reza, just to be friendly, "Hey, if there is anything 826 Seattle can ever do to help you out..." and the next thing I know (like the next day) Audra is emailing me saying she heard we would help some of her students pass the WASL.

Now, reading carefully through our mission statement I couldn't find anything about helping with the WASL (and I am personally kind of down on standardized tests), but when Audra explained the situation, we decided to declare a WASL Emergency.

You see, many of Audra's students (12 to be exact) have fulfilled every one of their high school requirements and are ready to graduate, except they haven't been able to achieve a passing WASL grade. With the (controversial) No Child Left Behind Act, it is now required that every student pass this test in order to receive a high school diploma. Given the fact that for most of these particular students English is a second language and for some even our alphabet is new, I can just imagine how hard it is to pass that test. That doesn't mean they don't speak English seemingly as well as you and I do. I just know that I claim to be Spanish bi-lingual and my writing in Spanish sometimes elicits guffaws from many a native speaker. The guffawing did not stop me from traveling to Ecuador years ago on a Fulbright Scholarship to do research (conducted in Spanish) for my masters degree. I'm not only taking this opportunity to brag about my Fulbright (I've gotten a lot of mileage out of that Fulbright) but also to point out that someone can be fairly high functioning in a second language without

being able to adequately place articles and conjugate past progressive verb tenses completely correctly. (I am living proof of poor past progressive tenses.) So, how can 826 Seattle help ambitious kids who want to get ahead in life jump through the essential hoop of acquiring a high school diploma?

826 Seattle stepped to the plate. Alex sent an email to all of our trained tutors under the subject line: It's a WASL Emergency. Within minutes (slight exaggeration), several tutors had written back, willing to travel to Jackson and 22nd to the Bright Future headquarters, meet the 12 high school seniors in question, and help them study for their one last chance at the WASL test (in March). Stay tuned for a future update: tutoring started this week. And let's put our cyber-hands together for the spontaneity of those tutors who jiggled their evening calendars around to help these kids out.

Last-minute things: mark your calendars for April 10th, when we have our third, and last, John Marshall School publishing party. As you may know, the school is closing after this year and the programs that function from this building are being dispersed throughout the city to other facilities. But on the evening of April 10th, you'll have a chance to hear some wonderful readers tell you about happiness (the theme of this year's book) and you'll hear John Moe (of National Public Radio fame) talk about why he has been so involved with this project this year and you'll have an opportunity to purchase copies of the book and have the young authors sign your copy(s). And yes, like last year we are producing (thanks to KUOW) a CD of select students reading their work which will come (at no extra cost) with the book(s) you've already purchased.

We've launched our new writing series for adults "How To Write Like I Do," which will not only help adults write better, but will also help our bank account which will help us help kids write better. Each of the 12 workshops is \$27 and taught by a local luminary. Two of the sessions are already sold out, and the rest of the tickets are flying out the door. Go to [www.826seattle.org/writelikeido](http://www.826seattle.org/writelikeido) for more info and a link to PayPal to get your tickets. Do it quickly.

Finally, it's probably not news to you that our country is suffering a little (or big) economic decline that is affecting the housing market. If any of you readers out there have a little real estate you've been meaning to sell, you might want to consider selling it *tout de suite* before the market spirals down even more. On the other hand, maybe it has hit rock bottom now and there will never be a better buyers' market. In this case, there might be readers out there who want to jump on this opportunity for a home purchase. Those of us at 826 Seattle can't look into a crystal ball and tell you what to do but we can tell you that if you want to buy or sell, Kim Colaprete (<http://www.msrealestatediva.com>) is still on board to help you buy or sell and, provided you remember to utter the words "826 Seattle," give us a percentage of her commission. We've been the recipient of two commissions so far, and let's just say: it's a good thing for everyone.

That's it. Finally. If so darn much didn't happen (and we could afford an editor on staff) these would be shorter.

Happy February,

Teri