

Creative Arts and Writing Winners

Submitted by Claudia Benner



Photo provided

Congratulations to JM's Creative Arts and Writing winners! The contest, now in its 41st year, is sponsored by the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School PTA

and encourages students to express their artistic creativity. More than 500 entries were received in categories ranging from poetry, computer art and musical composition.

Talented students wowed the judges with their excellent work, now on display at the JM library. Well done, Jaguars!

Spanish Fiesta at Orinda elementary schools

Submitted by Margaret Grover-Roos



Photos provided

The 11th Annual Spanish "Fiesta" was held May 3, showcasing Spanish students from all four Orinda elementary schools. This event is the culmination of a yearlong Spanish language enrichment program run

by Viva el Español on each campus, with over 350 students participating across the district. Students sang traditional Latin American songs and presented imaginary cities that they created - all in "español."



Family Focus

Choosing Your Friends Wisely

By Margie Ryerson, MFT

"To flatter and follow others, without being flattered and followed in turn, is but a state of half-enjoyment." – Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 1818

Doug, age 52, was battling depression and had been coming in for therapy for seven months. In the course of reflecting on his life, Doug realized that he had allowed some people to treat him rather shabbily, only exacerbating his feelings of low self-worth. He tended to befriend people that he admired, especially if they were confident, fun and successful. Although Doug projected an attitude of self-assurance and success, he struggled with inner feelings that were just the opposite. As a result his friendships were generally superficial and not close.

While some of his friends were kind people, two of them tended to brag a lot and showed little empathy for others by often belittling them. Upon closer examination, Doug realized he didn't actually like or respect the way these two people behaved towards him and others. However, Doug was a very loyal person who believed that once someone was his friend, he or she should be a friend for life. It was kind of like the Girl Scout song, "Make new friends and keep the old, one is silver and the other is gold." And he had always looked only at himself in a critical way, automatically giving others a pass.

Choosing friends wisely means observing carefully how others' words and actions affect you. One earmark of a healthy relationship is feeling good about yourself when you're with the other person – and also afterward. You can have a good time with someone, sharing laughs or a fun activity, but if later you experience strong self-doubts or hurt or resentment, something is amiss.

Just as you may work on your relationship with your partner when it needs improvement, it is also important to evaluate your friendships

when necessary. Of course, you need to be able to let things go up to a certain point and hope that your friends will do the same for you. But if you are frequently dissatisfied or resentful in a friendship, it helps to determine whether or not it can be fixed.

First look within yourself to try to determine why you may be reacting negatively to a friend. Are you going through a rough patch and simply projecting some of your dissatisfactions with yourself onto someone else? Are you being too critical in general or are your expectations too high?

Next you want to try to determine what is causing your negative feelings toward your friend. This doesn't mean you are right and your friend is wrong. It's often not a question of right or wrong, but can simply be a matter of incompatibility or different styles and values. You want to see if the issue or issues that are getting in the way for you can be resolved.

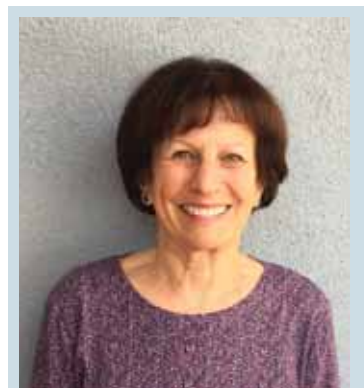
I see many people in my therapy practice who struggle with the issue of how to handle friendships. For example, one client, 32-year-old Susannah, had a longtime friend from college, Blaine, who was also single and lived close by. Because so many of her other friends had significant others, Susannah and Blaine spent a lot of time together. Susannah began to notice more and more that Blaine talked mainly about herself and didn't seem to show much interest in Susannah or what she had to say. In therapy, Susannah often complained about Blaine and felt hurt and angry about how she was treated by her. Susannah tried letting Blaine know how she was feeling without being accusatory, but Blaine got angry and defensive. Finally Susannah decided to gradually reduce the amount of time she spent with Blaine.

Susannah didn't want to discard their friendship altogether and made sure they still spent time

together. But she also wanted to avoid the negative feelings she was having about their relationship. By decreasing the amount of their interaction and making an effort to spend more time with friends who were more supportive of her, Susannah could more easily enjoy the time she spent with Blaine and adjust her expectations for their relationship.

Evaluating your relationships to see the effect they have on you is an important way of taking care of yourself. If a friendship is causing you to consistently feel stressed or upset or bad about yourself, this is a sign that it's time to do something about it. It may mean speaking up, it may mean tweaking the friendship in some way, or it may mean, as in Doug's case, severing a relationship. Doug ultimately decided to ease away completely from the two friends who weren't a good match for him. And because he had first considered the situation carefully, he was able to withdraw without guilt or remorse.

In the next Family Focus column we'll discuss how to help your child choose friends wisely.



Margie Ryerson, MFT, is a marriage and family therapist in Orinda and Walnut Creek. She is the author of "Appetite for Life: Stories of Recovery from Anorexia, Bulimia and Compulsive Overeating" and "Treat Your Partner Like a Dog: How to Breed a Better Relationship." Contact her at (925) 376-9323 or margierye@yahoo.com.

Gael Pantry helps food insecure SMC students

By Sora O'Doherty



SMC student Leora Mosman inspired the Gael Pantry's inception with her study of student food insecurity. Photos Sora O'Doherty



The Gael Pantry offers Saint Mary's students a way to supplement their nutritional needs.

With increasing tuition and housing costs, many higher education students find ways to cut overall expenses through their food budget, and recent studies have put a spotlight on the often hidden problem of food insecurity, with almost half of the 30,000 students at two- and four-year universities surveyed in a 2016 study stating they had some level of anxiety about getting food or being hungry. The Gael Pantry, which opened two years ago on the Saint Mary's College campus in Moraga, is increasingly combating food insecurity among its students.

The brainchild of SMC student Leora Mosman, the food pantry occupies a bright spot on campus where students can drop in on Tuesday, Wednesdays and Thursdays for help in meeting their nutritional needs. The program, which now serves over 200 students, has experienced steady growth of about 30 percent per semester since its inception.

Nick van Santen, assistant director for Student Services who manages the pantry, sees the growth as a result of better information about the existence of the facility, rather than evidence of increasing need. Students hear about the Gael Pantry during Welcome Week at the beginning of the academic year and are encouraged to sign up to volunteer.

Sodexo, the campus food service provider, donated the space for the pantry and the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano Counties donated food storage bins. The food itself is donated and the pantry is staffed entirely by student volunteers, who receive basic volunteer training and work in pairs for one-hour shifts. Over 60 students who volunteer in the pantry worked a total of approximately 180 hours last semester.

The athletics department and the School of Education have donated food to the pantry and the library accepts food for fines, providing over 150 pounds of donated food to the pantry, which is intended to supplement, not replace, a student's food requirements. The pantry is open to everyone, to minimize any possible

stigma that might be associated with accepting help, and operates on the honor system.

Currently only open to students, van Santen said that in the future the college might consider opening the pantry to faculty and staff, few of whom live in Moraga but commute in from more affordable areas. Students who live on campus are required to have a meal plan with Sodexo, except for some juniors and seniors who live in dorms with kitchen units. Commuters and graduate students are not required to have meal plans, but can purchase them. Saint Mary's merit-based scholarships specifically exclude help with housing or food.

At the Gael Pantry, student IDs are collected for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the system and to keep track of the student's point usage. Each student is allowed 10 points per week to acquire different types of food available. For example, one point can be used for canned beans, energy bars, macaroni and cheese or oatmeal. For two points a student can get canned tuna, fruit, soup or vegetables, while for three points cereal, rice, pasta or jam is available. Van Santen's job is to keep food on the shelves and manage the student volunteers.

Karin McClelland is the Director of Saint Mary's Mission and Ministry Center and oversees the pantry. While she also tries to provide food to students at events, McClelland says that the college does not have a huge endowment and is limited in what it can do. The food pantry is one of the ways that Saint Mary's can live out its mission, she says. Mosman is graduating this year and going on to an internship in Washington D.C. but leaves her legacy at Saint Mary's in the food pantry.

The Gael Pantry is open during academic terms on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6 to 8 p.m. and also on Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., which is a time when no classes are scheduled. In total, the pantry is open 7 hours a week, nearly 100 hours a semester.

Please...



...thanks