



# 40

*Center Montessori School*  
1976 - 2016

## A New School on the Horizon

It was the winter of 1976, and as Kara celebrated her birthday, I began to realize kindergarten was approaching and wondered what school would meet her needs to my satisfaction. After all, she'd been reading fluently since she was four. I was pretty proud of that, so much so that when friends would come over, I'd get out that day's St. Pete Times and ask her to read out loud. I was so impressed but everyone else was too. But now her prowess became an issue for me as I thought about selecting the "right" school. Where to start challenged me. So I began with my neighborhood school, where my mother had taught and where I'd gone to school, Anna Maria Elementary.

I had wonderful memories of Anna Maria. I loved it, I loved my teachers, and it felt good returning there. But the answer I got to my question, what would you do with a kindergarten child who could read fluently, was disappointing. Studies, he said, show that by third grade everyone else would have caught up. Off to St Stephens.

I repeated my situation and my question related to Kara. Again an answer I didn't like, they'd not advance her vertically but they'd move her horizontally, enrichment not acceleration. Off to Bradenton Christian.

A rerun on my part led me to hear a new response there. They used the Lippincott reading program. And though Kara could read well, she was probably missing something of their program, so she would do the Lippincott ABC Book. Off to the Gerber School.

I repeated my question without a bingo. They told me they were specialists in teaching reading. They would use their phonetic approach with her.

Time to go home and think. Rather quickly I realized I had no other choice but to start a school for her!

## Mara Fulk, Administrator

After moving to Bradenton in 2003, it was clear to me that my daughter Kiara was ready for a Montessori environment. My research led me straight to Center Montessori School. During Kiara's time in the Center Nest, I began to get familiar with the school, the philosophy and the family feeling. Being raised in a Montessori school, as well as being an AMI Montessori trained teacher who had taught, opened and ran Montessori schools it was quickly clear to me that CMS was unique in many ways. By Kiara's second year, I was volunteering in a primary classroom and soon started teaching part time. By 2005 I was a teacher of one of our primary classrooms and I was loving it!! The school's ability to follow the child and cater to the families really appealed to me and I was ecstatic that my family had found CMS. Being married to a soccer coach, it was unlikely that we were staying in the area long, however after 4 years, we decided it was the place to raise our family. Most importantly for the school, but also for the beach!

Over the years, I have taught in Primary, Elementary 2 and now have the pleasure of finishing up my 7<sup>th</sup> year as the Administrator. Center Montessori holds a special spot in my heart and my family's history. Keith and I feel so lucky to be able to be part of CMS both as parents and employees. Center's family atmosphere, aggressive academics and fierce dedication to each child continues to shape both Kiara and Alessandro into strong, appreciative, intelligent young people. I am hopeful that Center can continue to touch people's lives for 40 more years!!



## Michelle Peterson, Office Manager

The Center has been with me almost my entire life. I began here when I was 4 years old in 1978, with my mom, Rosa Rudolph, who was a primary teacher from 1978 until her retirement in 2010. I continued studying here through 6th grade. I am thrilled to pass my experience of a loving, child-centered and nurturing learning environment on to my children. My son Hunter attended from 4 years old until 8th grade graduation in 2013. My daughter Natalee began in Center Nest in fall 2005 at 18 months until today as an upcoming 8th grader! I returned to the Center with Natalee after a decade in the banking industry. Working with Karen Beach learning an immense amount of information from her as the office assistant and eventually becoming office manager in 2012.

## Christine Wood, Nest Teacher

To think about how I came to the Center is such a gift to me that fills my heart. While I realize how much I give of myself, the Center has given me that much back and more. My daughter began at the Center East Campus August 2002. We watched our daughter go from being very apprehensive about things to very confident. It was delightful to experience the independence that was being fostered in her, and I was also learning the new Montessori language that I was about to immerse myself in.

I began my teacher's journey by coming to fill in during the teachers lunch/break time. My son was just 2 years old...so while I was there he could be in the environment with me for that short period of time. I was able to watch my son in the environment too. Erica encouraged me to go back to school to receive my AMS early childhood credentials. I met with Janice before I dove in, and with her support and the amazing support of my husband, I knew this was going to be my life work.

I then was an intern with Saleha at our East Campus. She was an amazing mentor and teacher for my children. She gave me so much inspiration as I worked with her.

As my daughter was at the main campus, I was feeling that my need to have myself and my children at the same place. I then worked with Mara as my mentor in P3 which she has gifted me with so much of her knowledge. I have become my best self through being exposed to so many of the wonderful people, past and present.

Now I am the Center Nest teacher and love also where I am now. I have grown in so many ways as I am sure everyone agrees that children teach us so much!

## Saleha Hafiz, Primary Teacher

I joined the Center's team 16 years ago when I had freshly finished graduate school and was looking for an opportunity to experience working in a Montessori early childhood setting. The Center welcomed me as a classroom assistant for a year then supported me in furthering my Montessori education and offered me a teaching position thereafter. I was thrilled to make this my career and have quickly come to consider the center as my second family.

One of the many reasons that I love this school is having the opportunity to get to know well the families and the children that we serve throughout the entire time span that they spend at our school. From toddlers to teens, I feel such joy watching these children grow and develop over the years, and even more when they return to visit as accomplished young adults.

## Tammy Moya, Primary Assistant

I began my journey at Center Montessori in July 2003 with my oldest daughter. I came in to visit one of the primary classrooms and loved the way the students worked in a Montessori environment, all working freely within limits. I wanted that for my child! My first years I worked at here at The Center I was a classroom assistant to teacher Linda Gore. After 16 years here and with my first child soon to attend college, I still love the Montessori Method. I thank Janice Mattina and the Center Montessori family for welcoming me and allowing me to be a part of this wonderful family.



## **Betty Camacho, Primary Teacher**

I will never forget the day I visited the school in February 1997. All the wooden materials, the beauty in the practical life lessons and they well occupied students working silently. It was at that very moment that I fall in love with CMS. A few days later I got a call for an interview with the owner of the school. I was extremely nervous and anxious, my English was limited but I felt courageous. I met Janice Mattina she was kind and to my surprise she was speaking Spanish to me. I left her office with a huge smile and all I was thinking was what a great, kind and patience woman.

Just a few days later I started my journey at CMS. I started as an aftercare worker, then I had the pleasure to work with Janice and Gerda as their assistant in Elementary 1. The following school years I worked with Rosa Rudolph in 1998 and with Linda Gore 1999 in Primary. In 2000 I became the mother of my first and only child. The Center made arrangements for me to have my son on campus, I thank Karen Beach for caring for him during that time!

In 2001 the Center Nest opened, I was thrilled when I found out I would be the assistant and have my son with me. At the end of that school year the teacher was moving and with confidence I asked Janice to send me to train to become a teacher. She believed in me, and I started my training in the summer of 2001 at SFMTC and became the teacher of the Center Nest until 2011. I was trained in Early Childhood at PHMTEC and became a primary teacher up to today. This school has been my family since the day I started working here. I can't not think of a better place than CMS. Thank you Janice Martina for believing in me.

## **Crystal Gulakins, Primary Teacher**

Although I've only just joined the CMS family this past year I completely feel a part of it already. Since the day I visited with Mara and toured the campus I had such a great feeling during this time here. That feeling was even greater once I joined the community, everyone made me feel so welcomed from the staff to the children and parents. I feel right at home in this lovely community.

## **Rachel Reid, Elementary Teacher**

When Janice opened the Center in 1976, I was privileged to be a 4 year student in her class. Naturally, I did not know at the time how my life would be shaped and impacted by this amazing experience of spending my childhood at the Center. However, forty years later, I can proudly and gratefully say that Janice has positively influenced my life and who I am as a teacher, a mother, a wife, a friend, and also as a human being.

Janice models the utmost respect for the child as a learner and a unique individual. Janice's goal is for the children at the Center to feel safe, happy, and respected, because without that, no true learning will occur. Because of this, the children can excel to their full potential and beyond with the advanced cosmic curriculum of Dr. Maria Montessori that follows the child. The philosophy of Dr. Caleb Gattegno is also a vital part to the Center with his ideas of teaching being subordinate to learning which demonstrates respect to the child.

Janice offers the same respect for the teachers at the Center. She has created not only a wonderfully enriching environment for the children, but for the Center staff as well. I believe that this is one of the many reasons that so many faculty members have been committed to the Center for so many years.

My commitment to the Center began 19 years ago in the fall of 1998. I had completed graduate school with a Master's Degree in the History of Art and knew that I wanted to work with children. Janice offered me a position in her classroom and I could not have been more thrilled. Since then, I have completed my Montessori Teacher Training at the Institute for Advanced Montessori Studies in Silver Spring, Maryland. With Janice's support and encouragement, I have also been trained in teaching Redirecting Children's Behavior, Redirecting a Cooperative Classroom, and Collaborative Proactive Solutions. We have had extensive training in Positive Discipline, as well as Non-Violent Communication and the Meyers-Briggs Personality Types. I am forever grateful for these amazing opportunities to continue to learn and grow.

Finally, I am grateful to have the unique perspective of having been a Montessori child at this school, and now a teacher and a parent of a child at the Center. I can tell you without a doubt that Janice has created an incredible school. It is an incredible gift you are offering your children by having them at the Center in her presence.

## Juana Yount, Elementary Teacher

I came to the Center looking for a job and fell in love with the clean environment, the Montessori materials and the children. I couldn't believe I was seeing such young children doing math, writing sentences, reading and working on geography maps on the floor. I spent almost an hour just observing the children, watching them manipulate the materials, walking and moving through the classroom with such confidence. I LOVED IT! Although the only work available at that time was as a substitute, I started substituting in primary and over time I moved to E1 as an assistant and Spanish teacher, and worked to earn my training certificate to also become an E1 teacher.

After almost 17 years working at Center, I still love it! I love to see the children as children. I feel such gratitude to the children because I learn from them every day. The Maria Montessori quote that is the most meaningful to me is:

"The child is truly a miraculous being, and this should be felt deeply by the educator."



## Jayne Cobb, Elementary 2 Teacher

I noticed, with intrigue, the activity of my neighbor's daughter one day. The child was carefully observing something she had found in nature and her response to it was charming and unique. When I asked my neighbor about it, she commented that her child was attending a Montessori school. I was fascinated. She told me all about the ways children were taught to observe in the garden and about manipulative materials that helped explain math concepts. In the days to come, we spent considerable time discussing the merits of the Montessori Method. Years passed and when I had an opportunity to do Montessori teacher training, I jumped at the chance. I loved the method and the philosophy. I remember being so excited as I began to read the words of Maria Montessori: "Our aim is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his innermost core." It still brings tears to my eyes when I read this quote.

As part of my Montessori training, I needed a mentor/consultant. Robin Edidin and I had been friends for some time and I was so grateful when she agreed to support me as a consultant. I was interning at another school and she was so helpful to me in my beginning year. She shared with me some of her delightful experiences as a teacher and I was soon convinced that I should consider working for, what was then called, *The Center for Education*.

I remember the day I met Janice as if it was yesterday. She was so warm and welcoming, I knew I was home. What struck me the most was her kind and supportive way with children! It was beyond gentleness, there was magic in her words. Janice continues to inspire me daily.

I began as an E1 teacher working with my dear friend and colleague Julie Chateauvert. We had wonderful times together sharing Montessori's lessons with our students. Later I was asked to teach in E2 with Cindy Pitt. Cindy was amazing. She helped me understand this new age group and their keen desire for learning. It wasn't long before I sought Upper Elementary training. Currently I work with Susan Rouwhorst whose kindness and creativity is a blessing to our E2 environment.

## Susan Rouwhorst Elementary 2 Teacher

Two years ago I began searching for my next adventure in Montessori teaching. Having worked in Primary for several years and then taking the training to work with the challenging most amazing people, the toddlers, I felt a need to move to something different. In my quest, I temporarily came up empty-handed and thoughts began to creep in of a complete change in career. Pastry chef. Writer. Fry-cook on the moon. Suddenly, I remembered that that was a Montessori school in Bradenton. Living in south Sarasota, the school was slightly off my radar, although thing that I had heard in the past were nothing but glowing. I made the leap and made the cold call. The pleasant voice on the other end of the phone (Vall) was very upbeat and friendly. She encouraged me to send my resume and within a day I received an email from Mara and an interview was set up. As I pulled my car into the alleyway and saw the vines on the fences, I felt instantly excited. Stepping on the campus, I just knew. This was the place I wanted to be. Mara was so easy to talk to in the interview, I felt as if I were catching up with an old friend. Then she asked if I would be willing to work with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. This question triggered a memory from conversation with my youngest child nearly a year prior. He, at the time, was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and kept on about this idea of working with older kids. "You just should, Mom. I can see you working with kids my age." Hm. Maybe this kid was on to something. After meeting Jayne and finding out that she had grown up in my homeland of Bermuda, it seemed like kismet had brought me to Center Montessori. Then I had the pleasure of meeting Janice. She has this incredible way of making kids and grownups alike feel calm, understood, and cared about. Wow. I am so grateful to be here!



## Deana Reemelin, Level 3 Teacher

In 2004, my older son started at Center Montessori School in the Primary 2 class room with Ms. Linda and Ms. Tammy. As a traditional teacher, my education had included a little information about Maria Montessori and her teaching methods. I attended all of the informational meetings that the Center had to offer: Words in Color, Silent Math Night, Follow the Child. I began reading books like *The Absorbent Mind*, written by Maria Montessori. I tried to learn as much as I could. My son would bring home work that was far more advanced than what was being taught with the traditional curriculum. After three years, the opportunity to become a teacher at Center Montessori was presented. I was an E1 teacher on the math side for two years. I have always had a love for math and was so excited to share it with the students. After I learned the Montessori math lessons and had worked with the E1 students for a little while I remember thinking that every child should learn math this way! I wanted to go back to my old school and tell them, "This is what you should be doing!" In 2009 I moved to L3 to teach 6<sup>th</sup> grade where I currently spend my days with an awesome group of students.

## Erica Andrejkovics, Level 3 Assistant

Linda Gore and I were at Northeastern Montessori Institute taking our primary certification class when we met. We had a wonderful time training and supporting each other as well as another young lady from my school in Sarasota. We ended up rooming together. Linda had told me all sorts of wonderful things about the Center and her class there. I was so surprised that there was a Bradenton Montessori school so close to me. I was making a 40 minute trip across town to a Montessori school in Sarasota.

After some time had passed we eventually registered both of my children at the Center -so we had Cindy, Eileen, and Robin as their teachers. I felt so welcomed and part of a family at the Center. As a family, we underwent some personal and financial difficulties and at that time I was under employed- working part time. I kept in touch with Linda and she let me know that the Center had a job available in the office doing admissions and inquiries. I jumped at the chance to work at the Center!! Janice hired me shortly thereafter and then my adult learning experience continued.

Janice was the foundation upon which I built my family's life. Her knowledge and wisdom she shared openly, her friendship she gave willingly, and I have never loved a job more. Quite literally Janice single handedly saved my family. Nothing more or less.

## Robin Edidin, Level 3 Teacher

I was introduced to the Center in the same way that many of our other teachers were: through my child. We were returning to the Sarasota-Bradenton area and were looking for a Montessori school for our seven year old. Friends of ours recommended the Center, and it was love at first sight. First and foremost, it was the positive interaction between the students and teachers that grabbed me, but it was also the thoughtful, inviting lessons and materials that went beyond what many Montessori schools offer. I had recently taken Montessori elementary training, and as part of that, had visited a slew of Montessori schools. The Center stood out as an exceptional school.

My child started at the Center in 1989, but I did not. However, the next year, a position for an Elementary 2 teacher opened up, and the rest, as they say, is history. Teaching Elementary 2 was lots of fun, even as I groped my way through my first year. As our year culminated in a trip to Seacamp and in a presentation of end of the year projects, I was sure I had found my niche in teaching. I had been teaching Elementary 2 for five years when talk of a middle school began. The Center had grown since I had started teaching there, and a number of parents were inquiring about a middle school. At that time, E-2, which went through fifth grade, was the jumping-off point. Janice, who had previously said many times that she was NOT going to open a middle school, now began exploring the possibility. A committee (composed of Janice, Cindy Pitt, Eileen Wise, Gerda Wetterau, and me) began exploring what a Montessori middle school at the Center might look like. As we began researching potential middle school formats, I became intrigued. It dawned on me that *this* was the age group I really wanted to teach. I had loved teaching at the Elementary 2 level, but something inexplicably drew me to young adolescents. After some soul-searching, I went to Janice and told her that if and when we started a middle school, I wanted to be part of it.

That summer, the summer of 1996, I took my middle school training with Betsy Coe, at the Houston Montessori Center, and over the course of the summer, I underwent a dramatic paradigm shift in the way I understood and saw young adolescents. I was awed by all of the changes that the 11-14 year old goes through, and I was moved by the Montessori commitment to support the unique needs of this age group.

Over the past 20 years, I've been fortunate to share so many incredible experiences with our students. We've traveled to North Carolina, Utah, Quebec, Arizona, Virginia, New York, Belize, Alabama (for Space Academy), and Arkansas (to the Heifer Ranch). For the first ten years of our middle school, we presented a Shakespeare play each year. (We stopped when chorus started to produce musicals.) We've had several businesses: most notably our salad bar business, followed by our hot lunch business. We've created fun, beautiful, and crazy things together, have done exciting science, and fun history simulations. We've participated in twenty ROPES courses, from Sarasota to Micanopy (but most have been at DaySpring). We've shared books that have moved many of us, and have had writing celebrations in our classroom. We've planted over 900 trees and bushes at our land lab, and we've built iguana enclosures, a composting toilet building, two decks, and two gazebos. We've done community service at The Pines, Headstart, Children's Haven, the Humane Societies of Sarasota and Bradenton, Cat Depot, FELT, and Pack-A-Sack. We've gone camping together 18 out of our 20 years, and we've designed and built countless toothpick bridges. We've had numerous coffee houses and poetry cafes where our students read poetry, performed music, did stand-up comedy and more. We've designed, built, operated, and deconstructed nineteen haunted houses. Over the years, our middle school students have made a wide array of videos, covering such subjects as the French Revolution, the kinetic theory of gases, the life of Gandhi, the lives of explorers, and Thales's Mathematical Discovery. And I'm honored to have been a part of all of it.

I can't end this article without a shout out to all of the wonderful, incredible co-teachers I've had over the years: Cindy Pitt and Eileen Wise from my E-2 days, and Jill Stansberry, Mandy Denomme, Julie Haagensen, Deana Reemelin, Erica Andrejkovics, and Beronica Johnson, who have been with me on the Level 3 journey. Each of these amazing women has touched my life in countless ways, and they've each been *my* teachers too. And then of course, there's Janice. From the first day that I met her, to the present, I've been inspired and moved by Janice's vision for her school, and for her deep reverence for children (*and* adolescents). Janice has given each of us the autonomy we need and want, to operate our classrooms as we see fit, and has supported us in countless ways. And as I look back over the past 27 years, I'm so grateful.

# FUN TIMES AT CENTER MONTESSORI

