

## Part 1: THE SCHOOL



*The secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field... Our aim is so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core... to help him in his growth, mental and emotional as well as physical.*

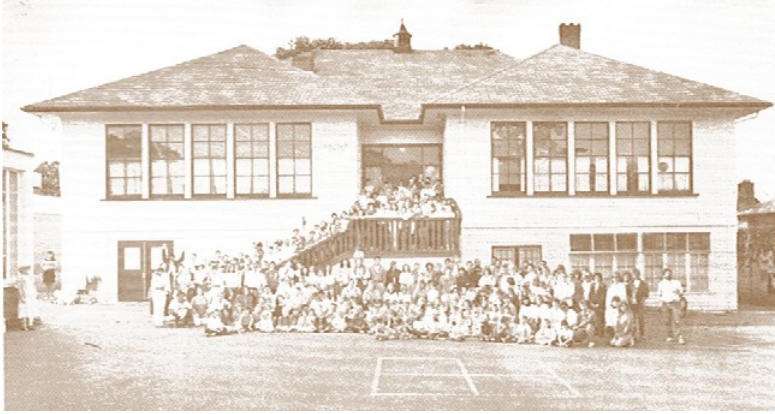
**- Maria Montessori**

"To Educate the Human Potential"



*The child is a being in a constant state of metamorphosis,  
creating for himself the person he is to be.*

## A short history of Selkirk Montessori School



In the fall of 1979, three mothers decided they would like to see a Montessori school that continued to the elementary level. Community interest in Montessori as an educational alternative had been growing and the long waiting lists of all preschools — Montessori and others — indicated a true need for more schools.

Out of these initial discussions, ideas grew, meetings were planned and work began. Work parties made equipment and committees started negotiations for finding a building, licensing the preschool, hiring teachers and filling enrolment requirements—all of which took thousands of hours of parents volunteered time and effort. Classes began at the Montessori Centre of Victoria in September 1980 in an old wooden-frame building on the grounds of Oaklands Elementary School.

The two main objectives for the school were:

- to provide a strong base of students for an elementary program
- to fulfill provincial requirements concerning staffing and curriculum, and acquire independent school status, in addition to maintaining a Montessori focus

Students for the elementary program came from the schools own half-day preschool programs and the all-day preschool programs, which began in 1981; from other Montessori schools; and from regular elementary programs.

Achieving independent school status was necessary for the school because it was a way to meet the present and future needs of the children in a highly mobile society, and to establish a basis for financial assistance for the operations of the school (and, by extension, for the parents).

One of the many requirements of independent school status in British Columbia was to have been in operation for three years before applying to the Ministry of Education; we received independent school status in 1984. The grants have since been used to reduce the operating costs (and thus the tuition) of the school. Among the specific requirements for maintaining this status are:

- following the curriculum guidelines of the province
- staffing the school with B.C. certified teachers
- maintaining accurate attendance records
- following the ministry's established reporting procedures

Similarly, our preschool programs must meet the requirements of the Child Care Facilities Licensing Board, which dictates student/teacher ratios, physical setting, staff qualifications, age range for children, and programs.

The Montessori philosophy and method has continued to be of paramount importance to the school, and has involved a lot of planning and work by parents and staff. Didactic materials, for example, needed to be purchased, made, and renewed over time. Hiring Montessori teachers has also been a challenge, because of the double requirement: for B.C. licensed teachers and for Montessori training. Here too, of course, we have been extremely successful! (See “The teaching staff,” page 9.)

Our school community’s growth has not always been along a smooth, even path, however. There have been the inevitable stumbling blocks that any organization must face. Perhaps the most demanding situation was the traumatic fire of May 1985, when some adolescents (not students at the school) spent a Sunday afternoon setting fires. The fire caused serious damage to our Lionel Street building. We were compelled to close the school for a week, re-establish in another location (portable classrooms generously loaned to us by Camosun College), reassure parents and staff that we would indeed reopen, arrange for all the insurance claims, renegotiate the schools lease with District 61, contract for all the repairs, organize parent work parties to supplement the contracted work, and more. It was truly an awesome task and responsibility for our board, parents and staff.

The Pacific Montessori Society met its next great challenge in February 1998, when the children broke ground on the site of our new home at the Selkirk Waterfront development; classes began at the beautiful new Selkirk Montessori School in September.



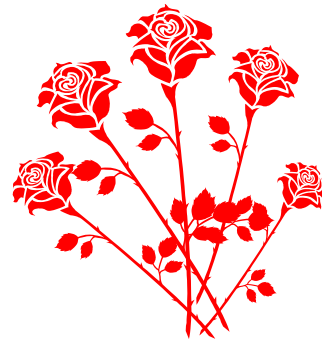
Now, more than 28 years after our inception, we are recognized by the community of Greater Victoria as a source of a meaningful, quality education. We are recognized by the international Montessori community as a well-established, well-staffed and well-administered Montessori school. Indeed, we have been honoured to be host site for two different training programs (AMS and St. Nicholas).

There is still more to be done, of course. The school is a vibrant, living community. We are excited by the potential for children, staff and the Selkirk Montessori School community.

## Karen Colussi, our founding principal

One of the three mothers who decided to start an elementary-level Montessori school was Karen Colussi. Karen was the first principal of the Montessori Centre of Victoria, a position she held for 18 years. All four of her children graduated from the school.

Karen's enormous efforts and strong vision culminated in the building of Selkirk Montessori School. She died of breast cancer one month after attending the ground-breaking ceremony for the new school in February 1998. The new school building is dedicated to her.



### **Karen Lorna Colussi**

1948-1998

This building is dedicated to Karen Colussi, co-founder and administrator of the Pacific Montessori Society, 1980 to 1998.

Her physical presence within this cornerstone provides a continuity between the roots she established at the initial home of the school, and the promise of continued growth in the new home she worked towards so tirelessly.

Her academic presence lives within the school and is manifest through the continued strength of the program she believed so strongly in and in turn within each individual student who attends this institution.

Her spiritual presence reaches all of us who are brought together to use this facility, from various communities and backgrounds and for various purposes.

—*Inscribed on the Selkirk Montessori School cornerstone*

Please see Appendix A for more about Karen Colussi.

## School Structure

Selkirk Montessori School is operated by the Pacific Montessori Society. The Karen L. Colussi Foundation is responsible for furthering the aims of the Pacific Montessori Society.

### The Pacific Montessori Society (PMS)

The Pacific Montessori Society (PMS) is a non-profit society officially registered with the provincial government and registered with the federal government as a charitable society. A copy of the society's constitution and bylaws is filed with the Registrar of Companies. The society was founded in 1980. All parents in good standing are members of the PMS.

In accordance with the Societies Act, the Board of Directors of the society is elected at the annual general meeting, and serves without any remuneration. Terms are for three years. Members of the PMS are eligible to run for office.

Formal board meetings take place monthly. However, board members must be available for impromptu meetings as required; attend annual general meetings, Open House, parent meetings and school events; meet with staff; observe all classes; and meet, when necessary, with the Board of Directors of the Karen L. Colussi Foundation.

Parents are encouraged to attend board meetings and the PMS Annual General Meeting, and place items on the agenda (see Meetings, page 30). In addition, please feel free to ask board members directly for any specific information you may need.

Once elected to the board, directors are chosen for specific positions by vote of the entire board. A summary of duties is available each year before the AGM. This information is accompanied by a copy of the Code of Ethics under which the PMS Board of Directors operates.

### The Karen L. Colussi Foundation

In 1980, Karen and David Colussi, together with two other committed families, formed the non-profit PMS and began a Montessori school in Victoria, renting space from the Victoria School District, at the former shingle annex of Oaklands Elementary School. The new school was unique in that it offered Montessori classes at the elementary level.

The school was appropriately named the Montessori Centre of Victoria, and its principal for the next 18 years was Karen L. Colussi. Born on January 8, 1948 in Ontario and married to David Colussi in 1970, Karen died of cancer in Victoria on February 28, 1998.

The Karen L. Colussi Foundation (formerly the Pacific Montessori Foundation) is an officially registered non-profit charitable organization and a copy of its constitution and bylaws is filed with the Registrar of Companies. It was incorporated in 1993 as a long-term commitment to the Pacific Montessori Society school.

The Foundation became the repository of the schools capital building funds and it holds the title to the school's new building. This building forms the fulfillment of Karen's vision of the school in a new home of its own, teacher-designed, and fulfilling the building design ideals she had learned in the course of many years in a crowded but much-loved old school house. It is a state of the art facility that serves the needs of parents and the community at large.

The Foundation exists to preserve Karen's legacy and to ensure that the building will always be preserved for the use of the Selkirk Montessori School . It also provides a medium for gifts, donations, bequests and endowments. Its aim is also to sponsor and support events and programs which promote the aims and objectives of the Pacific Montessori Society.

The Foundation is made up of a group of dedicated volunteers, all of whom have had a long association with the school and continue to support the society in its endeavors. Its members are selected at the Annual General Meeting and serve a renewable five year term.

## The Teaching Staff

Our staff is highly qualified. Each of the teachers brings a wealth of education, experience, knowledge and dedication to our school, enriching the learning environment for the children (and for parents, too).

In addition to being B.C.certified, teachers have been trained in the Montessori philosophy and method through internationally recognized programs such as those offered by the American Montessori Society (New York), Association Montessori Internationale (London, England), and/or the St. Nicholas Montessori Centre (London, England). Our preschool teachers must also have their Early Childhood Education (ECE) certification.



## Selkirk Parent Group (SPG)

The Selkirk Parent Group (SPG) is an independent committee of the Pacific Montessori Society (PMS). It adheres to the constitution and bylaws of the PMS. The SPG has its own guidelines.

The role of the SPG is to contribute to the effectiveness of the school by promoting the involvement of parents including facilitating communication within the parent community and liaising with the PMS Board. In addition, the SPG raises funds to directly support the activities of the students of Selkirk Montessori School and undertakes activities and events to support the roles outlined above. Examples of SPG activities include running the school lunch program, coordinating a “welcome back to school” BBQ, spearheading school charitable drives, and acting as class representatives.

Membership in the SPG includes any parent/guardian who is a member of the PMS, and remains in good standing, according to the PMS Bylaw Part 2 Item 4, except for the exclusions listed in 2.

Administrators, staff and PMS Board members can serve as non-voting members of the SPG.



*"The work of the child consists of creating the human being that it has to become. The adult works to improve his environment while the child works to improve himself."*

*- Maria Montessori*

## **General Policies**

The PMS Board of Directors is responsible for the development, approval and implementation of school policies. The process includes input from administration, staff, parents and students. The following policies are currently in place and are posted to our website:

1. Appeals and Complaint Policy and Procedure
2. Child Protection Policy
3. Conflict of Interest Policy
4. Discipline Policy
5. Field Trip Policy
6. Financial Management Policy
7. Inclusive Education Policy
8. International Student Policy
9. Personal Information Privacy Policy and Principles
10. Student Bullying Prevention and Management Policy
11. Student Computer Policy
12. Student Record Policy
13. Supervision Policy
14. Tuition Refund Policy

Existing policies are being revised and new ones developed on an on-going basis.

## Admissions Policy

Selkirk Montessori School follows the routines and procedures outlined below. Any situation not answered by the material below will be covered through parent, teacher and administrator meetings.

The school follows regulations provided by the Child Care Facilities Licensing Board for determining student/teacher ratios and age range in each preschool level class.

The school will follow the essential Montessori principles of balancing age and gender in any given class, where such opportunities occur.

It is the responsibility of each family to take note of and follow the guidelines as presented in the newsletter and registration forms.

Parents may choose to enroll their kindergarten-aged child at Selkirk for half-day and at another school (i.e., French Immersion) for the other half. In this instance, the family is not eligible for the provincial grant at Selkirk, and is responsible for any shortfall in funding the school might experience.

All new children are enrolled for a probationary period of six to eight weeks. This time period provides the school and parents with the opportunity to ensure that each child will enjoy her/himself and benefit from this particular setting and program. (Under certain situations the trial period may be extended.)

Prior to the start of each new school year, any transfers in program or class take place through consultation with the administration. Once the school year has begun, transfers are done in consultation with the parent, teacher and administration.

Transfer from the preschool to the elementary program is not based solely upon age; specific academic skills, social and emotional readiness, and physical maturity are also contributing factors. Our particular philosophy and physical organization provide the school with a great deal of flexibility; we are therefore able to place children according to their readiness and needs.

Children are not placed in the school after February of each school year. February is the mid-point of the school year, and placements after this are not beneficial to the new child, the children already in the class, or the teaching staff.

## Awards and Bursaries

### Karen L. Colussi Awards

The Karen L. Colussi Awards Program were established in 1998 to honour the memory of our founding parent and long-time principal and administrator, Karen Colussi. In establishing the program, the Board of Directors of the Pacific Montessori Society tried to place an emphasis on those ideals which were dear to Karen's heart : inclusion, multiculturalism, academic excellence, creative ability (literary, visual or performing arts, music) athletics and community service. The first awards were offered in the 1998/99 school year.

In the 2001/2002 school year the administration of the awards was taken over by the Karen L. Colussi Foundation but the criteria has remained the same. In selecting recipients of the awards, the board will consider recommendations from teachers, instructors and/or other interested members of the community with regard to:

- community service/citizenship
- academic achievement or potential
- athletic achievement or potential
- achievement in music, literary, visual or performing arts

The call for applications is announced in the school newsletter in the spring each year, and modest awards are given at the end of the school year (June).

### Bursary Program

We are very proud of the bursary program that was established in the Pacific Montessori Society's early years, and which has provided opportunities for children to continue their Montessori education in times of temporary financial difficulty.

Bursaries are intended only for families with children in the elementary program. Because families require different amounts of assistance, the administration uses its discretion in determining the final number and dollar figure of the bursaries for any given school year.

In selecting bursary recipients, the administration will consider:

- length of membership in the Pacific Montessori Society
- past or potential volunteer contribution or commitment by the family to the society
- number of children currently enrolled in the school
- potential sibling enrolment

Historically, families who require the assistance of a bursary have not wanted their circumstances known. The administration promises complete confidentiality in these cases.

To apply, families must provide a general statement of financial need and an estimate of how long they may require assistance. Application forms are available from the school office. All applications will be reviewed by the administration, and families will be notified in a timely fashion of the status of their application.

