

Creating
GREEN ZONE SCHOOLS

*The Art of Learning in Your Green
Zone*

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DEDICATED TO ...

Those parents, teachers and principals,

who create an inspiring

Green Zone environment

for their children.

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Our deepest gratitude to our families

and to all of the members of our

“family of the heart”

for their continual love,

inspiration and support.

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	Learning in Your Green Zone	1
	What is your Green Zone?	4
<i>Chapter 1</i>	The Green Zone Model and Children with Emotional Problems - Interview with Wayne Cain (Counsellor)	6
<i>Chapter 2</i>	Green Zone Classrooms - Interview with Wayne Cain, Bette Davis, Cristal Diemer-Ewles, Craig Knight and Nancy Stairs	12
<i>Chapter 3</i>	Green Zone Students - Interview with Jenna and Maria Aylward	50
<i>Chapter 4</i>	Green Zone Teachers and Principals - Interview with Corinne Winnel (Teacher) - Interview with Mary Ann Nova (Principal) Characteristics of Green Zone Schools	60 70 86
<i>Chapter 5</i>	Yellow and Red Zone Schools and Teachers -Interview with Cara Characteristics of Yellow and Red Zone Schools and Teachers	87 94

<i>Chapter 6</i>	Yellow and Red Zone Students and Their Families' Focus on Special Needs - Interview with Candy	100
<i>Chapter 7</i>	Preparing Students for Work in the Community - Letter from Barry	111
<i>Chapter 8</i>	Students and Sports - Interview with John	120
<i>Chapter 9</i>	Struggles of Immigrant Families and Their Children - Letter from Harris - Interview with Rob Grimminck	128
<i>Chapter 10</i>	Helping Yellow and Red Zone Students - Interview with Mary - Letter from Leslie (tutor)	145
<i>Chapter 11</i>	Creating Green Zone Schools at Home - Interview with Donna McNeil	151
<i>Chapter 12</i>	Struggles of Creative Children	164

-Introduction-

LEARNING IN YOUR GREEN ZONE

An ancient African proverb says that, it takes a whole village to raise a child. And if our goal is to raise happy, healthy and peaceful children or Green Zone children then that village needs to be comprised of Green Zone families, schools and communities.

Based on our personal and professional experiences it has become apparent that to create Green Zone Schools we need an environment in which teaching and learning become an enjoyable and meaningful growth promoting experience for students as well as teachers. In such an environment, children are respected and valued while teachers are not only supported by their colleagues and principals, but also enjoy a cooperative relationship with parents.

Green Zone children are created and nurtured to their highest potential by Green Zone families, schools and communities. These three systems have to work together to ensure that the needs of the children are met. If there are conflicts between those systems, they need to be resolved gracefully, respectfully and peacefully as the adults representing those systems are the role models for the next generation.

Dr. K. Sohail and Bette Davis RN BN MN

Green Zone Families

The family system is the first system that children experience when they come into this world. This system passes on the values and traditions of one generation to the next. The family system is tied with invisible threads, on the one hand, to individuals and, on the other hand, to the community. When children are raised in happy and healthy Green Zone families then it is easier for them to become part of Green Zone schools.

Green Zone Schools

The main role of the school system is to continue the growth process that families have started at home. A Green Zone school system not only helps children get in touch with their academic potential but also prepares them to work and serve humanity to the best of their ability, as well to become an integral part of a Green Zone Community.

Green Zone Communities

A Green Zone Community is based on humanistic principles in which all citizens enjoy equal opportunities, rights and privileges irrespective of religious, ethnic, gender and class differences. Such a community supports Green Zone families and schools so that happy and healthy children grow up to become happy and healthy adults thus preparing the foundation for the next generation.

Creating Green Zone Schools

Dreams of a Green Zone World

We are all aware that those children who are exposed to neglect and abuse in Red Zone families, schools and communities have a tendency to either suffer with serious emotional problems themselves or become delinquent and part of the cycle of violence. That cycle of violence can go on from one generation to another significantly increasing emotional and social suffering.

To decrease human suffering and create an environment in which people from all walks of life can live and grow together, we need to think and work together to create Green Zone families, schools and communities for our children as they are the hopes and dreams of a Green Zone future.

What is your Green Zone?

For those who have yet to read the other books in the Green Zone Series, we would like to share the descriptions of the Green, Yellow and Red Zones as an introduction to this fifth book in the series.

When living in your Green Zone, you are pleasant and cheerful, looking forward to the day and its events in a positive manner. You are capable of a free exchange of caring and affection with family, friends and co-workers and are ready for a rational dialogue with people around you. If there is a difference of opinion, you are able to have a healthy and constructive dialogue to resolve and dissolve conflicts, which will smooth out the bumpy road of differences.

But if you find yourself in what we call the Yellow Zone, you feel somewhat distressed, weary or uncaring. You can become anxious, sad and sometimes angry. Because of this discomfort you are not able to communicate properly with others and are poorly equipped to deal with stressful situations or conflicts where an interpersonal solution is required.

When you go into the Red Zone, you become extremely distressed, often exhausted, angry, unhappy or depressed. You sometimes lose control and become abusive or completely withdraw from others. You find yourself unable to have a rational dialogue that could lead to resolving your interpersonal conflicts. At times, in an extreme case, you may have reached the point where you are unwilling or unmotivated to take care of yourself to socially acceptable standards.

The easiest way to understand the Green Zone Model is to think about the traffic lights - Green means everything is okay, a Yellow light signals caution, while the Red light warns you to stop. You would always like to see a green light ahead, wouldn't you; something that clearly says it is safe. Mentally, that is what your Green Zone is all about, the place where you want to remain, where you are happy, healthy and peaceful.

THE GREEN ZONE MODEL AND CHILDREN WITH EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

In the last couple of years, I have had a number of pleasant surprises since the publication of my book, *The Art of Living in Your Green Zone*. I met so many people who not only read the book themselves but also gave it to their friends and family members. Some used it in their professional lives. It was also amazing for me to hear how they had modified and improvised the Green Zone Model to suit their personal and professional needs. As I listened to their stories, it dawned on me that the creativity of the Green Zone Model was less like a song that needed to be sung the same way again and again and more like a musical instrument, such as a piano, that could be played in different ways by different musicians. Each musician could create a new song or a new tune and play it on the same instrument. One such creative artist is Wayne Cain who not only introduced the Green Zone Model in his counseling practice with students but made significant additions to the Model. Later on he became a bridge between our clinic and the school system. I invited him for an interview to share his experiences and insights.

- S: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for our book, *Creating Green Zone Schools*. I am curious about how you got involved with counseling children in the school system.
- W: As far as counseling is concerned I have been doing it for nearly twenty years. I started working in a psychiatric hospital with very disturbed adolescents. It was a rewarding but also frustrating experience. In the psychiatric hospital there was too much emphasis on the pathology. I wanted to work in a healthy environment where there was less power imbalance. I wanted to work in a holistic and inclusive atmosphere. So when an opportunity arose I applied to work with the school board. Now I have been working with them for four years and it has been an enjoyable experience for me. I see children from kindergarten all the way up to Grade 12. I may see them for a few sessions but in some cases it is long term if there are behavioral and personality problems involved. I try to connect the student with family and community support.
- S: How do the teachers respond to your intervention?
- W: Generally they are very receptive and appreciative. There are times I find the teachers themselves in the Yellow or Red Zone. Some find it difficult to deal with the stress in the classroom and to cope with so many students and so many classes.
- S: How do the parents respond?

W: Mostly very welcoming. But there are times they are resistive if they feel blamed by the students or the teachers. There are parents who are themselves living in the Yellow or the Red Zone because of their financial or emotional problems and they have a hard time coping with children with multiple problems. I try to help them do some networking in the community as well as helping the children.

S: I was quite impressed when you shared with me that you have included the Green Zone Model in your counseling practice. Can you share with me some of the highlights of that experience?

W: I found your Green Zone Model quite complementary to what I have been already doing. And that is one good thing about the Model, that as a practitioner, I can add it to other models and it enhances their efficiency.

Let me share with you one example. I was working with a Grade 6 student who was having difficulties in school and was feeling very anxious. He was having problems with trusting me and not only making a commitment to his schoolwork but to therapy as well. I tried many techniques but they did not work. So I tried the Green Zone Model and explained to him that he lives in three Emotional Zones at different times during the day. I drew the traffic lights for him - Green, Yellow and Red and told him that when he is in the Green Zone he is happy, when he is in the Yellow Zone he is anxious and when he is in the Red Zone he

loses control. I told him the goal of therapy is to identify all those factors and circumstances that get him into the Yellow and Red Zones and then help him cope with those factors so that he can spend more and more time in the Green Zone. He felt quite connected with the Model and got excited about therapy. The Green Zone Model helped me connect with him and work through his problems.

One of the good things about the Green Zone concept is that it does not blame people. It has a neutral language. He took the model home and his parents liked it. It was easier for them to say, "You are in the Yellow, rather than saying 'you are rude and obnoxious'". Teachers liked it, too. It gave them a neutral language also. Gradually the whole atmosphere changed for him in school and at home. There were no more accusations and persecutions. They all started working together to create a healthy and happy Green Zone environment.

S: Did you introduce the Model to the school system?

W: Yes, I met with the teacher and the principal and did a small presentation. They were quite excited about it and they started using that language too and found it quite helpful. It took the tension out of the interaction with the student and he felt less blamed and then he was less resistive to change.

S: You had also devised some techniques for introducing the Green Zone in the school.

- W: Yes, I found different ways to anchor the Model. I made a map for the student. It started from home then included the bus ride to the school and then in the school I drew the classroom, the corridors and the playground. We discussed how he felt in each part of the map. It was easier for him to identify which parts were in the Green Zone, which were in the Yellow and which were in the Red Zone. I tried that with other students as well. Some students are fine in the classroom but are bullied in the playground so for them the classroom is in the Green Zone but the playground is the Red Zone. For some, the bus ride is the Yellow Zone experience. Identifying those areas helped in the discussion and problem solving. From smaller kids, I bought erasers - Green, Yellow and Red erasers. When they were distressed they raised the Yellow or Red eraser and the teacher knew that they needed help and how serious the issue was. The erasers helped them deal with problems without any acting out or disruption.
- S: How do you think other teachers and counselors would view this concept?
- W: I think they would find it very helpful. If the teachers explain the Model to the students, as it is easy to understand, then they can all work together to create a Green Zone classroom and school. Once the parents know it they can help too, so that the students not only have Green Zone schools but also a Green Zone family environment. This Model can also connect parents and teachers and they can work

together to help their children. It can also prevent many crises.

B: How do you feel teachers would respond if we approach them with the Green Zone concept?

W: I am confident they would respond well except those who feel overwhelmed and are living and working in the Yellow and Red Zones themselves. They are so upset with their day-to-day work that they are not open to any new ideas. They are burnt out. In a strange way those are the teachers that need this Model the most, not only for the classroom but also in their own professional and personal lives. Some teachers are reluctant to accept any idea until it is approved by the administration so you might have to talk to the principals, superintendents or Board of Education to introduce the Model. But I feel that if they are progressive they will accept it. I am confident it would be very helpful to create a stress free environment for students and teachers. It is a Model that it is easy to understand and implement but makes profound differences in a short time. If they can all work together it would be very helpful. I am already recommending it to my colleagues and they find it very beneficial.

B: Thank you for sharing your ideas and experiences.

W: Wish you all the best.

GREEN ZONE CLASSROOMS

While we were developing the Green Zone Model and writing the Green Zone Series, Monique Aubin approached me as she was very concerned about the struggles of teenagers. I had interviewed her earlier for my book, *The Art of Living in Your Green Zone* because I wanted to present her as an example of a person who lived in her Green Zone. Monique believed that if teenagers were introduced to the Green Zone Philosophy in high schools, it would not only help them create Green Zone classrooms but also help them have a foundation to lead a happy and healthy life in their future. I was quite excited about the project. She prepared a brochure and approached a few high schools. The principals liked the concept but were reluctant to get their students involved in a new project until it was approved by the Board of Education. To get that approval we needed to convince the members that the Model was useful and effective. We were in a catch twenty-two. Principals needed the blessing from the Board and the Board members needed schools to try it as a pilot project before they could give their approval. We realized that we needed some teachers who would volunteer to be part of the pilot project.

While we were trying to solve this dilemma, Wayne Cain, a well-respected counselor in our

community, shared with me that he worked in a number of schools and knew an adventurous teacher Vivian Riva, who taught a sociology course to high school students. (Wayne's ideas about the Green Zone and his experiences in introducing the Model in his counseling practice were discussed in the previous chapter.) When we discussed the proposal with Vivian, she was quite thrilled to try it as her classroom project. She invited me, Bette Davis and Wayne Cain and introduced us to her class. I presented the Green Zone Philosophy and Model while Bette and Wayne presented a six-week proposal to the class. They shared with the students the following program:

- First week - Introduction to Green, Yellow and Red Emotional Zones.
- Second Week - Introduction to Green, Yellow and Red Zone Relationships and Systems.
- Third Week - Recognizing Green, Yellow and Red Zones in your personal lives.
- Fourth Week - Recovering from Yellow and Red Zones.
- Fifth Week - Restraining from entering Yellow and Red Zones.
- Sixth Week - Review of the project and feedback.

The students were quite excited to be part of the project. After the introductory session when the students completed the Green Zone Questionnaire, Bette and Wayne met with the class every week for 70 minutes. Vivian was very supportive. At the end the students gave their verbal and written feedback. They found the whole experience beneficial and

meaningful. I was quite impressed by the enthusiasm of the students.

While we were meeting with Wayne and Vivian to plan the project we were also discussing the proposal with another teacher, Cristal Diemer-Ewles, who had been very active in the Teacher's Union and taught those students who did not fit in the traditional school system. Cristal had already read our book, *The Art of Working in Your Green Zone* and was quite impressed. Together with her colleague, Nancy Stairs, they planned a six week project for their students. We were so excited to see Wayne, Cristal and Nancy working together to improvise our Green Zone Questionnaire for the school system. Cristal and Nancy finished the project and then invited Bette and me to meet with the students and get feedback from them. We were impressed by their hard work.

During the time we were involved in developing the school projects, I was invited to speak at the local Unitarian Church one Sunday morning on the Green Zone. At the end of my presentation, I shared that we were planning to present our philosophy in the high school system. After my presentation I was pleasantly surprised when Craig Knight came to talk to me. He shared with me that he had finished his Masters in Holistic Education. When I showed a keen interest, he was quite willing to let me read his thesis. I was impressed that he had used story telling as one of the methods for enhancing Holistic Education. Craig was curious to see the introduction and evolution of the Green Zone Philosophy in the school system. He believed that Holistic Education and Green Zone Philosophy were complementary. He volunteered to join Bette and

Wayne in one of their classroom discussions with high school students.

I feel very confident now that when teachers approach their principals and the Boards of Education in the future we can share these questionnaires and feedback from students, teachers and counselors thus removing this obstacle to introducing the Green Zone Model to the school systems. I am also confident that parents would support teachers and counselors so that their children could learn skills to create and live in their healthy, happy and peaceful Green Zone inside and outside school.

After both projects in the schools were over Wayne, Bette, Craig, Cristal, Nancy, and I meet to share observations, experiences and ideas about Green Zone classrooms and schools. Each project team was interviewed during that meeting. The following are excerpts from those interviews.

Highlights of the Interview with Wayne Cain and Bette Davis

- S: Wayne, I was quite impressed when you met with Cristal and Nancy and created a Green Zone Questionnaire for the students. How did you conceive the new questionnaire?
- W: Ideas came from my professional experiences. I work in mainstream schools that operate on the philosophy that regardless of children's challenge or ability or disability they would be serviced in an inclusive model. So recognizing the population and wanting to respect the environment that the kids are in, the questionnaire had to reflect all aspects of their

environment. The Green Zone of one student can be a Red Zone of another student. For example, hallways are common to many students and if the school has unresolved issues of anger and violence, they can easily become Yellow or Red Zone areas. Helping children to identify the problem and then deal with it, helps them create a Green Zone school environment.

S: Can you tell me what made you choose Vivian Riva and her class for the Green Zone Project?

W: Vivian is a teacher at a high school where she has worked in the humanities for a considerable length of time. I had successfully partnered with her on other projects and so I approached her because of her passion for education. I talked to her about your Green Zone Model. I told her that you wanted to see it grow from Green Zone individuals to Green Zone schools to Green Zone communities. After listening to my proposal she showed great interest. At that time she was teaching a Grade 12 sociology class. She felt that it would be a nice compliment to the curriculum as well as a beneficial life style management tool for the students. I was glad that she opened up her classroom to Bette, you and me to present the Green Zone Model to her students. Vivian was very supportive of the project and kept the momentum going.

S: You shared with me that you sent a letter to the parents before starting the project.

- W: To establish the integrity of the project, I prepared a letter for parents so that we could build a bridge between students, teachers and parents. (A copy of this letter and other support materials are included at the end of this chapter.) They were asked to contact me if they had any objections. None of the parents called which meant we had their approval. After the preparation we had the orientation session in which you and Bette joined us and introduced the Model to the class.
- S: I was quite impressed by the class. The students were very enthusiastic and motivated. They seemed to be quite high functioning. It appeared as if they were from healthy upper middle class Green Zone Families. Was my impression correct?
- W: You are right. Those students were from high functioning families of the community. They were in Grade 12 and had dreams to go to university and become professionals.
- S: You and Bette met with the class every week discussing different aspects of the Green Zone I and helping them benefit from it in the class and life in general. What was the experience like for you?
- W: Each week was a kind of an unknown experience for me because I wasn't really going in with a whole lot of expectations. I was letting the project unfold. I had used the Green Zone with individual students who were having emotional difficulties in school. Taking it to the

classroom was a new experience. It was exciting but also a bit unnerving in the beginning. But the students were so cooperative that the anxiety left and it became more and more exciting. As Bette and I felt more comfortable we became more creative.

In one of the beginning sessions, we divided the class in three groups, Green, Yellow and Red Groups, gave them Bristol Board and asked them to identify Green, Yellow and Red Zone thoughts, feelings and experiences. That exercise got them involved in the project. From the thoughts and feelings we went to the Green, Yellow and Red Zone situations and how they could be handled. Students shared wonderful stories from their educational, family and social lives that anchored the concept in their minds. The Red Zone Group was nervous as they felt inhibited first but when we gave them the go-ahead to be open, they became more honest and acted out some of their experiences which were quite productive, entertaining and a learning experience for the whole class.

- S: Bette, you shared that in one of your weekly discussions with the students, you and Wayne devised a metaphor that really helped the students with the Green Zone Model. Can you share it with us?
- B: Sure. One of the reasons I really like the Green Zone Model is that it is easily learned and people can begin applying it in their lives immediately. In the classroom, we were discussing which Zones the students lived in

most of the time and which Zones they visited and for how long. The students found the metaphor of the size of their house in each Zone amusing. I used this idea to help them get a sense of where they were emotionally by choosing the size of the house they owned according to the amount of time they spent in each Zone. We talked about having a small condo in the Red Zone and a big house in the Green Zone or visa versa. They laughed when I said I knew someone who was so Red Zone that she owned a subdivision there! When the students started humorously extending the metaphor, talking about their family members and themselves in association to what size houses and in what Zone they each lived, it was obvious that they were engaged in the process and were able to make the concept applicable to their day to day lives.

They also liked another metaphor we used, when we discussed driving through the Red and Yellow Zones and what they can do to drive back to the Green Zone and not park in the Red Zone.

- S: Did you have any surprises during the project?
B: I was really surprised that many of the students could share a lot of Green Zone experiences and discussed many creative ways to cope with Yellow and Red Zone encounters. I was pleased that most of them lived in the Green Zone the majority of the time. For the most part, they had healthy family lives. They were also able to discuss different ways to cope with frustration

and anger, and resolve conflicts with their dear ones. They were quite open and honest and candid. I was impressed that it did not take them long to start using the Green Zone language.

- S: If you have to do the project next year how would you do it different?
- W: I am realizing that the concept is quite flexible and one can modify it depending upon the needs of the class. The class in which we introduced the concept was a high functioning class. If I have to do it with a similar class again, rather than six weekly sessions, I would do it once a month for four months. In that way it would give them time in between the sessions to practice it and adopt it in their day to day lives in school as well as at home. In that way there would be more time for the concept to be anchored and become part of their lifestyle.
- S: What was the best part of that Green Zone encounter with students?
- W: I think probably the nicest thing about the Model is that it's non-threatening and that the students could learn it and even become mentors for others without coming across as experts or arrogant or intrusive.
- B: I agree with Wayne. One of the students in the class shared with us that he went to another class first thing in the morning; he said it was a Red Zone class. Other students who attended the same class agreed with him. After learning

the Model he approached the teacher and introduced the Green Zone concept, within a few weeks the classroom transformed into a Green Zone classroom. He said that even though the teacher tended to be a Red Zone person he was not threatened by the student approaching him and responded positively to the student's explanation. We were all pleased to see that they did something to change the Red Zone classroom. The Green Zone Model helped the student and the teacher learn some skills and then apply them.

W: It was very empowering for the student and also helped other students to be hopeful that they can transform Red Zone classrooms into Green Zone classrooms.

*Highlights of the Interview with Cristal
Diemer-Ewles and Nancy Stairs*

S: Cristal, can you tell me a little bit about your educational and professional background?

C: I have a Bachelor in Arts and Masters in Education. I worked with special education students in a vocational school prior to my current environment. I presently teach a program especially designed for at risk students, age 14 to 15 who have significant difficulties attending and being successful in regular secondary schools.

S: Maybe you can share a little bit too Nancy about your background?

- N: Like Cristal, I also have a Bachelor in Arts and Masters in Education. I was a technical education teacher for eleven years, and then worked with a team of educators to introduce an alternative credit program for students of 14/15 years of age who find it difficult to attend a regular school. After teaching in that program for about twelve years, I became a facilitator working with SALEP [Supervised Alternative Learning for Excused Pupils] students throughout Durham Region. This program provides a stimulating opportunity to support youth.
- S: My impression is that your classrooms are very different than Vivian's classroom. Is that true?
- C: You are right. The students we teach are at risk students. They are fourteen and fifteen year old students who, for a combination of reasons aren't being successful in the regular high school setting and stop attending school. A lot of times their families are experiencing a number of problems and the students are affected by those problems. Sometimes parents are not supportive in helping their children go to school. Students have difficulties fitting in socially and they withdraw from school and stay at home. We try to get these students involved in school activities and motivate them to come to school regularly.
- S: It sounds like an uphill struggle. Are their problems more social than academic?

- N: Many of them can be very bright students but they are lost and cannot focus on their studies. They struggle because of their poor attention span and poor concentration. They are distracted in life because of multiple emotional and family difficulties.
- S: Cristal, before joining the present project, you had read our book, *The Art of Working in Your Green Zone*. In that book, we had discussed that to create Green Zone Schools we also need teachers to be in the Green Zone. You had mentioned that more and more teachers are entering the Red Zone and getting stressed and burnt out. Why do you think that is?
- C: Teachers are stressed because of a wide range of reasons. There have been a number of changes in the curriculum that were implemented with little teacher consultation. The past years have seen our profession devalued and teachers do not feel respected or appreciated by the government. This situation was demoralizing for teachers. Teachers are getting frustrated as their working environments are no longer supportive and creative. Such an environment is not as dynamic for students, especially those who have emotional and academic problems. So in our school we try to create a dynamic, supportive and creative environment. We make our classrooms pleasant and welcoming in order to help our students revalue attending school.

- S: I always believed that the relationship between students and teachers is very sacred. If students do not respect teachers then it is hard for them to learn. I feel that that special relationship has been undermined in the last couple of decades. Do you agree?
- C: I think you are right. The profession has been devalued and there are more and more parents who are critical of teachers. Everyone has attended school and consequently see themselves as educational experts. When parents do not respect teachers, it becomes harder for their children to respect their teachers. When that happens, teachers and students get disconnected and end up with a combative relationship which is not conducive for learning. In our program we try to build a cooperative relationship with our students based on personal responsibility.
- S: Nancy, let us focus on the Green Zone Project now. It was my impression that you and Cristal put a lot of time and energy in this project in trying to create a Green Zone environment in your classrooms for your students. Can you share with me the highlights of that journey?
- N: Cristal initiated the project. She had met you and read your book. She introduced your Model to me and another colleague, Heather and suggested we try it with our kids. After we read your book we agreed with her that this Model can help our students to be able to take control of their emotional state and improve their behaviour. So we met as a group and

prepared a road map for the application of the Model. We introduced the Green Zone to our students, described the concepts and helped them apply it in their lives. To make it attractive we made a booklet with colorful graphics and brought in different objects with Green, Yellow and Red colours, including papers and candies.

- S: One of the differences between your project and Wayne's project was that in Vivian's class Wayne and Bette met with the students for only seventy minutes once a week but in your class you spend more time with the students.
- C: Yes, we have our kids all day long. So we could use the entire morning to introduce the concept and do the assessment. After which they could absorb it and then practice it. We also gave them a weekly reflection sheet so that they could make entries and highlight their Green, Yellow and Red experiences. Then we reviewed their progress every week for the following six weeks.
- S: I also saw papers of different colours on the notice board.
- N: Yes, we also cut out circles of papers of different colours so that our students could identify their Green, Yellow and Red feelings and experiences. Such practice helped them absorb and digest the concept. We wanted their experience to be educational as well as entertaining. I think they benefited from the whole experience. It helped them have more

control of their feelings and spend more time in the Green Zone.

- S: Did it affect their lives outside the classroom?
- C: Yes, one student shared that she introduced the Green Zone Model to her boyfriend because she thought it could improve their communication and relationship. She saw the Green Zone Model as a tool to use outside the classroom.
- S: As compared to Vivian's students who lived more in the Green Zone, my impression was that your students spent more time in the Yellow and Red Zones outside the school.
- N: You are right. Most of our kids live in Red Zone families and it is not uncommon for them to have Red Zone weekends. For many of them, regular schools had also become Red Zone schools. Their connection with us helped us introduce the Green Zone Model and then your Model helped us in creating a Green Zone environment. It helped them talk about their feelings and painful experiences at home and learn ways to cope with them. It was almost therapeutic. They could meet me in the morning and say "Nancy, are we Yellow today?" and smile. The Green Zone Model provided us with an opportunity to talk about our feelings. It helped us talk about finding ways to recover and restrain from entering the Yellow and Red Zone experiences.
- S: How long did your try the model?

- C: We tried it for six weeks. We reviewed their weekly reflections and then asked them to give us their overall feedback at the end of the six weeks. They were quite honest with the final feedback.
- S: How do you think the Green Zone Project helped your students?
- C: I believe it helped them get in touch with their feelings, deal with different losses and think about making better choices and decisions. I think it may also help them in their work environment as they learned skills to cope with conflicts.
- S: Anything they did not like?
- C: They did not like the weekly feedback too much as it became like homework.
- S: How many classes and students did you have?
- C: We had two classes and sixteen students. We had some turnover with new students coming in on a regular basis, so all the students could not participate for all six weeks. Some participated for a shorter period of time. It was amazing how they incorporated the Green, Yellow and Red Zone vocabulary into their day to day lives in a short period of time.
- S: You have been very successful in what you do. What do you think is the main difference between your schools and the traditional school that these children could not connect with?

- N: These children need a lot of one to one connection that traditional schools cannot provide. That special connection helps them get and stay motivated.
- C: We do a lot to try to ensure our students attend school, sometimes we phone them in the morning to get them up. We found out that some parents leave home to go to work at 6 am and the students sleep in. The student must get him or herself to school. Getting them to school is only part of our struggle. We also try to have the student find valuable reasons for attending school. We try to find unique qualities and abilities in our students and help them develop their special skills. Once they discover their uniqueness, it is easy for them to stay in the Green Zone.
- S: I fully agree with you. That is why in the introduction of my book I discussed that discovering one's special gift is a key factor in discovering a Green Zone lifestyle, and education as well as therapy helps that process. Teachers and therapists have some things in common. They help people discover their unique qualities and then cherish them.

Highlights of Interview with Craig Knight

- S: Craig, it was an interesting coincidence to meet you that Sunday morning in the Unitarian Church. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

- C: I have been working with children for seventeen years. My focus these days is Holistic Education. I believe wholeheartedly in its benefits to children and people in general. I have just completed my Masters and I am presently looking into a doctorate program.
- S: How would you describe Holistic Education?
- C: Holistic Education is a developmental process that encourages the individual to become their true potential allowing them to be a fully integrated person who contributes the much larger whole
- S: What do you see as the similarities between Holistic Education and the Green Zone Philosophy?
- C: I believe Holistic Education helps students discover and live in their Green Zone. The traditional educational model is so rigid and inflexible that students are forced to fit into the system. It does not respect the individuality and creativity of each student. Holistic Education helps students discover their uniqueness and then discover their Green Zone. That is why I was attracted to your Model as I saw it quite complementary to Holistic Education.
- S: I often saw the traditional school system as an exercise in mediocrity. It is an institutional teaching in which children with exceptional qualities or creative talents do not fit in and get into conflict with the teachers, the principals

and the school systems. How did you get introduced to Holistic Education?

- C: For me it was a very natural evolution. Even before entering the educational field, I was already in a holistic kind of mind set. After teaching different grade level students from different class and cultural backgrounds, I began to notice how effective holistic education was especially when you tap into the curiosity of your students and help them express themselves openly and freely. It is very satisfying to see those students getting motivated and inspired who were not benefiting from the traditional school system. In that process I was listening to myself and at the same time watching what was unfolding around me. When I talked to other people, I was pleased to find out that their experiences were similar to mine and that affirmed my observations and experiences and I became more involved in Holistic Education.
- S: It is my belief that teachers and parents need to be ready to experience Holistic Education. Wouldn't you say that many teachers and parents are reluctant to embrace it?
- C: You are right. Some are so conditioned by the traditional model that they cannot see outside the box. They are afraid of the unknown. But my experience shows that after a period of uncertainty we discover new forms of expressions and new models. For some people *holistic* is a scary word. In Holistic Education teachers along with students are involved in

self-exploration. It is a synergistic system in which teachers grow along with their students.

S: In your thesis, I was impressed to read that you used story telling as a vehicle in Holistic Education. How did you get involved with story telling?

C: I was inspired by the Native Indian tradition of oral story-telling. That tradition has existed for centuries. As my passion with Holistic Education evolved, I created a few stories that were effective tools for education. By reading those stories, students learned to value themselves and live in their Green Zone. Those children who do not value themselves are vulnerable to exhibit Red Zone behaviours.

S: In what kind of setting do you teach in now?

C: I teach students of Grade 5 to 8 who need care, custody and treatment. These students had difficulties with traditional schools and were sent to us. I have multiple grades in the same classroom. These types of classes benefit a lot from Holistic Education. The students I teach are also under the care of the Children's Aid Society and get emotional help from their counselors. I have on an average ten students in my class. This year there are thirteen.

S: How did you feel when you joined Wayne and Bette in Vivian's classroom?

C: I was impressed. I could see the students were enjoying learning the Green Zone Philosophy and then applying it in their day to day lives. I

am sure those students will not forget that Model for the rest of their lives and it will help them lead a healthy lifestyle. They will develop a healthy sense of self and that is what is common between Green Zone Philosophy and Holistic Education. Both Models help students develop a healthy sense of self. Most people don't know that *education* comes from a Latin word which means to bring forth the hidden self. In education, students have to discover their sense of self and then find their place and role in the world.

- S: Thank you very much for joining us in this adventurous project. I am sure when other teachers, parents and counselors read your observations and experiences it would inspire them to introduce the Green Zone Philosophy in their schools. Ultimately, I hope it will help children to become Green Zone people by improving their quality of relationships in school and at home, as well as discovering their hidden talents and sharing them with others. I share with my clients that this is a Philosophy that I follow myself. I try to practice what I teach.
- B: To finish I want to thank each of you for your hard work and creative contributions. I really enjoyed working with all of you. It was pure professional joy to be part of this Green Zone Project.

Green Zone School Program Support Materials

The final segment of this chapter includes some of the support materials used in the Green Zone Schools Program, such as the Letter to Parents explaining the Program, the Green Zone School Questionnaire for students and finally, the Evaluation Form all of which were either devised or adapted by Wayne Cain. The summary of comments from student participants completes this segment.

Letter to Parents

Dear Parents/ Guardians:

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you. I am the Child and Youth Counselor assigned to your child's school.

I am pleased to inform you that Ms. Vivian Riva has requested that all her students experience a workshop called, *Colour Your Life* based on the book, *The Art Of Living In Your Green Zone* by Dr. K. Sohail MB BS FRCP (C) . The focus of the workshop will be to assist individuals in increasing their awareness of their emotional states, communication styles and how to respond effectively within relationships.

As a result, the students will be able to self monitor their emotions, control their thoughts, experience positive relations, become proactive and most importantly, enjoy a healthier and happier life.

Should you have any questions, please contact me at the Education Centre, Student Services Department at 905-576-6707 or 1-877-482-0722 extension 116.

Respectfully,
Wayne Cain

GREEN ZONE SCHOOL QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME_____

DATE_____

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INDIVIDUALS

We have developed a questionnaire that is interesting and revealing, yet quite simple to complete. It will introduce you to the emotional concept of the *Green, Yellow and Red Zones*.

THE GREEN ZONE

When people choose to live in the Green Zone, they experience a variety of pleasant emotions, including feeling happy and peaceful. They easily carry on a rational discussion with those around them and, should a difference of opinion arise, they are able to actively connect with a healthy and constructive inner strength that helps them to resolve or dissolve their conflicts, and most importantly build bridges that span their differences.

THE YELLOW ZONE

When in the Yellow Zone, people feel somewhat distressed. Anxiety, sadness and anger too often rule their thoughts and actions. Because of their discomfort, they are unable to communicate with others effectively and are poorly equipped to deal

Dr. K. Sohail and Bette Davis RN BN MN

with stressful situations or conflicts. This Zone is a slippery slope that often leads to many problems that await them when they cannot hold on and fall into the Red Zone.

THE RED ZONE

Those who live in the Red Zone are extremely unhappy, and emotionally exhausted, they usually maintain a high state of hidden anger and are extremely distressed. They often lose control and become abusive or completely withdraw from others, sometimes fleeing to escape – even from themselves! They have great difficulty dealing with stressful situations, and maybe unable to have a rational discussion to resolve or dissolve their interpersonal conflicts. At times, they lack the will to take care of their personal appearance, overlook proper nourishment and avoid being responsible for themselves and their family.

To help you understand just where you are located within these three Zones, a Questionnaire follows that will greatly assist you to better understand how you are coping and dealing with life situations.

Completing your Questionnaire

It may be helpful by first making a working copy of the following Questionnaire pages. Record your answers in pencil on the work pages. Be fair, open and honest with yourself as you make entries. Don't hurry; think carefully before you write down your

opinions. When in doubt, be wise by making your temporary comments subject to later review to assure you make the best contribution possible to your personal assessment.

During your later review, when you are rewriting from your worksheet copies to the original, you will want to add or delete information so that your answer is clearer. We encourage you to do so. This is not the time to be impatient. If space is limited on the questionnaire and it would be useful as you feel you would want to write more, please use additional pages, rather than the back of these sheets, for expanded comments because the process of writing is very valuable to you. For instance, you may have had Green Zone years, but that changed, and needs explanation to assure it is understood properly by you when you read it at a later date. Take your time, you may be looking at paper right now, but in actual fact you are looking down a path of a better life. Let this questionnaire be another step along the way.

Best Wishes!

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What color Zones have you lived in most of your life? (If more than one, use a percentage figure to show the comparison.)

	Green	Yellow	Red
Birth to 5 years			
6 years to 12 years			
12 years to present			

2. In what Zones do you presently spend your time?
(Please show %)

	Green	Yellow	Red
Mostly			
Occasionally			
Rarely			

3. What Zones do you presently live in within your family environment? (Please show %)

	Green	Yellow	Red
Mostly			
Occasionally			
Rarely			

4. In your school environment, what Zones do you presently live in? (Please show %)

	Green	Yellow	Red
Mostly			
Occasionally			
Rarely			

5. In each area of school, indicate what Zone you are mostly in by placing an X in the correct space.

	Green	Yellow	Red
Arriving at school			
Hallways			
Classrooms			
Recess			
Lunch			
Washrooms			
School Yard			
Gym			
Office			
Program Support			
Teachers			
Bus Ride			
Students			
Departing School			
Homework			
Other (specify) _____			

6. In your present social environment, what Zones do you live in?

	Green	Yellow	Red
Mostly			
Occasionally			
Rarely			

7. If needed, what three things can you do to recover from the Yellow and Red Zones?

1.	
2.	
3.	

8. What are the three most important things you can do to restrain yourself from falling into the Yellow and Red Zones?

1.	
2.	
3.	

9. List your significant relationships and then decide in which Zone each lives.

Name	Relationship	Green	Yellow	Red
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				

10. In which significant relationships can you comfortably discuss the concept of Green, Yellow, and Red Zones so that will improve the quality of that relationship? (Please refer to item 9 above and *circle* the appropriate numbers.)
11. In which significant relationship(s) can you discuss the issue of finding a Mediator or a Therapist? (Please refer to item 9 above and add a *check mark* to the appropriate numbers.)

12. In which significant relationships can you dissolve (have little or no communication with in future) because there is no hope or willingness to resolve conflicts that could improve the quality of the relationship? (Please refer to item 9 above and draw an X through the appropriate numbers.)
13. List the social clubs, teams, as well as political, religious or cultural organizations you belong to and then decide the Zone you live in with each one.

Name	Green	Yellow	Red
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

14. What five things can you do to live regularly in the Green Zone?

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

15. Do you need professional help to live in the Green Zone? Explain why.

16. In the space below draw a picture of your school. Label and colour the areas that are *Green*, *Yellow* and *Red Zone* that pertain to your school.

COMMENT

When you live in the Green Zone during most aspects of your life, you are very likely leading a happy, healthy, peaceful and balanced life.

When the Yellow Zone causes pain during much of your life, you need to think seriously about how to improve the quality of your life by immediately discussing it with significant people you trust.

When the Red Zone dominates your life, you need to act immediately to seek professional counseling to bring fulfillment and joy into your life.

Green, Yellow, Red ~ what colour will you let shine in your life?

DISCOVERING YOUR GREEN DAY

As you choose to spend more and more time in your Green Zone, you can track your progress by using the chart that follows. Make photocopies so that you can have a record of how you were able to fine-tune your awareness and your responses over time.

DISCOVERING YOUR GREEN DAY

NAME_____DAY_____DATE_____		
ZONE	HOURS SPENT	WHAT WAS HAPPENING?
GREEN		
YELLOW		
RED		

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Evaluation of Green Zone School Program

Please complete the following evaluation to assist us in providing a quality program that is both practical and helpful for individuals to live their lives in the Green Zone.

In completing the questionnaire the following scale represents 1 = Poor, 3 = Good, 5 = Excellent.

1. The concept of Green, Yellow, & Red Zones was clearly defined.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

2. The concept of the Zones increased my awareness of self and others.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

3. The concept of the Zones assisted me to recover more quickly from the Yellow and Red Zones.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

Dr. K. Sohail and Bette Davis RN BN MN

4. The quality of my relationships has improved as a result of understanding the Green Zone concept.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

5. The techniques to restrain myself from the Yellow & Red Zones that I was taught were practical and helpful.

1 2 3 4 5

Comments _____

6. My lifestyle has improved as a result of being introduced to the Green, Yellow & Red Zone concept.

1 2 3 4 5

7. What differences has the concept of the Green Zone model made in your life at home, school and the community?

Comments _____

Feedback from Cristal and Nancy's Students

"This program is a good way to make people think about their feelings."

"This program was very well made up."

"This program is very good for people because I know that it is my choice to be happy and I think this program will really help people and allow them live a more happy life."

"This program is helpful because we need to know how to get in the Green Zone so we don't snap at people."

"Now instead of yelling at people and getting mad in my Red Zone, I listen to music or talk about it to get in my Green Zone."

"It has taught me to know how to cool out when stressed."

Feedback from Vivian's Students

"Now I have a better sense of myself, this experience changed my life."

"Very helpful, the techniques should help me through conflicts I may encounter in life."

"By understanding the model I am able to differentiate the Zones people are in and avoid going into the Red Zone."

"Now I am able to identify my Zones, deal with my problems and act rationally."

"It is a very simple concept that is extremely easy to understand."

-Chapter Three-

GREEN ZONE STUDENTS

As we have worked on this project, we have met a number of students who were leading a happy and healthy life. They were ambitious in school and successful in their social lives. We realized that they had discovered their Green Zone without any professional help, so we asked them to read our book, *The Art of Living in Your Green Zone* and share their awareness about creating Green Zones in their educational, personal and family lives. Maria and Jenna Aylward are examples of these Green Zone students. The following is an excerpt from my interview with them.

- B: Thank you both for agreeing to contribute to our book, *Creating Green Zone Schools*. Let's begin with each of you telling me a bit about yourself. Maria?
- M: My name is Maria Aylward and I'm nineteen years old. I'm in my second year of university studying Biochemistry and French.
- B: And what about you, Jenna?
- J: My name is Jenna Aylward and I am Maria's sister. I'm eighteen years old. It's my first year

in the university. Next term I'm going to try business and see if that works out.

B: I have known you and your family for a long time. I was always impressed by both of you as students - academically as well as socially - so I hoped by including you in our book you would inspire others. I was quite pleased when you read Dr. Sohail's book, *The Art of Living in your Green Zone* and liked it. What is your understanding of Green / Yellow / Red Zone philosophy?

M: For me, the Yellow and Red Zones reflect unhealthy lifestyles while Green Zone reflects healthy relationships, positive outlook and a better way of living.

J: For me, the Green Zone reflects a positive and healthy emotional space where I am comfortable with myself and at peace with everything around me.

B: Do you agree with me that both of you live in your Green Zone?

M: Yes, I do.

J: I agree.

B: What do you think is the secret of living in your Green Zone inside and outside the school?

J: My secret of Green Zone Living is my attempt to keep a balance between my school, home and social lives. For me my relationships with my friends and my family are very important so I try to keep them healthy. I think my balanced lifestyle is the secret.

- B: How do you balance the time between family and university?
- J: Finding that balance in university is more difficult than high school. As soon as I come home from university I concentrate on my homework. After supper I spend some time with my family in the evenings. I tend to reserve time on the weekends with my friends. That helps me balance different people and relationships in my life.
- B: And what is your secret, Maria?
- M: I agree with Jenna, that it is important to identify important things and people in your life and then find a balance. For me that balance is also the secret of physical and mental health. I keep important things as my priority.
- B: And what are they?
- M: My friends that I made in high school. I want to nurture those relationships, as they are important to me. I also consider my teachers as my role models. They are also significant.
- B: Did you have any problems with your relationships in school? And how did you deal with them?
- M: Yes, I had a number of challenges in my relationships in school. School can be very competitive. Sometimes it's just hard to see eye to eye with your friends.

- B: So how did you work through a situation if you didn't see eye to eye with your close friend? Do you have any hints about that?
- M: I try my best to have an honest and open communication in order to bring the relationship back into the Green Zone. I also try to put myself in the other person's shoes. Although, for some people it is a hard thing to do, but that is what I try to do and it usually works. When others find me sympathetic, they are more open to sorting out the problems and the communication improves.
- B: Jenna, did you encounter any conflicts when you were in school?
- J: For me, the most difficult part was to find a close circle of friends. But over time a group of five of us came together, which became seven and then ten. Those were the friends I could trust and it was wonderful. Those friends kept me in the Green Zone. Some students find it hard to do that.
- B: You made a very good point about finding a group that's compatible with you. When you are establishing your group of friends in your Green Zone what kinds of qualities do you look for?
- M: I found the biggest factor was proximity. My best friend lived behind our house. We had adjoining fences. If we did not live that close we might not have become such good friends, as we have different personalities. In other cases, I

became friends with those girls in school who shared my interests and hobbies and values.

J: I have a number of friends that were with me in school since kindergarten. I used to go to my friends' houses and meet their parents and brothers and sisters. They were all nice people and I felt at home in their homes.

B: What do you think would be some of the qualities that you would look for that would tell you that those relationships could be successful?

J: I have different friends with different personalities. There are some, like Katie that I go to when I am upset and feeling bad. She helps me feel better as she is sweet and funny. She is also a good listener and gives good advice. I also have a friend, Kendal who is very reliable. My friends are all unique but they keep me in balance and keep me in my Green Zone.

B: What do you think Maria?

M: I agree with Jenna, to have different types of friends. We don't want to be like those adults who look the same, wear the same type of clothes, same hair, and same looks. We want to look different to reflect our unique personalities but still be supportive of each other. I have my female friends that I go to when I have a problem with my boyfriend and then there are others with whom I just have fun.

- B: Do you have friends who expect you to call them on a regular basis and they feel offended if you don't have regular contact?
- J: Yes, I have friends that I talk to everyday because they are in my school and we attend all the classes together and have the same schedule. But then there are friends that I don't see everyday. But whenever we connect, we start where we left off. I think in good friendships there is no need to connect everyday.
- B: What is it about some people that they need to connect everyday?
- J: Some people feel lonely if they do not connect with their friends everyday, they feel isolated. They are needy and depend on others especially when they are going through hard times. They are generally not emotionally secure and independent.
- B: Can we talk a little bit about your teachers that stand out in your mind, teachers that created a healthy Green Zone classroom environment?
- M: Jenna and I had some of the same teachers who were very unique. We had a Green Zone teacher who was a sweet person and cared about each and every one of us. There were thirty students in the class but each one of us felt special.
- J: Yes, she got along with all of us, although some of us were hard to get along with. Then we found out that she had cancer and she died a little while ago. The response she got from students and teachers was incredible. It was

because she had touched so many lives in such a special way.

B: Do you think it was her ability to acknowledge people's individuality?

M: Yes, she made everyone feel special even though there were lots of us in the class. When she died we really felt a loss.

And then there was one teacher who had a great sense of humour. He told stories and jokes and we looked forward to attending his class. He inspired us to learn more. He made us feel excited about our school and studies. We knew he really cared about the class. He made the schoolwork exciting rather than boring.

J: Because of him we looked forward to going to school on Monday. He made us love school and education. He made boring subjects interesting and he cared about the students.

B: Based on your own experience what would you suggest to other students to stay in the Green Zone in the school and outside?

J: I think to live in the Green Zone as a student you definitely need to have a supportive group of friends. You need friends that you can trust and rely upon. To be in the Green Zone, students also need teachers that they respect and who inspire them and make schooling an enjoyable rather than a depressing experience. I also think you need to create a balance in your life to live in the Green Zone.

- M: To live in my Green Zone I tried to know my teachers. I talked to them and emailed them and shared with them how much I was interested in what they taught. I believe the learning experience has to be a personal encounter between teachers and students. It has to be exciting and enjoyable. I was fortunate to have that in my school. We both enjoyed trying new things and enjoyed sports. We liked playing soccer, rugby and basketball. That made life fun and we made so many new friends. We also got involved in student council. In school, we had so many opportunities and I feel students need to get involved in extra-curricular activities to create a balance in their lives. We also took part in drama festivals and tournaments. That is why we have so many fond memories of school and teachers and friends. It was an awesome experience. I think for a Green Zone experience students need to discover what they are good at and then develop that further and enjoy it. And that makes a difference in their lives.
- B: As students, what would be your advice to teachers to create Green Zone classrooms and schools?
- M: I think the first thing for a teacher to do is create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom so that students can be friendly with each other. Students need to have a good relationship with teachers so that they can ask any question without worrying that they are asking stupid questions. They need to feel so comfortable with their teachers that they can discuss any problem

and the teachers can then guide them. In the Green Zone classroom, students need to feel comfortable to discuss things openly. Teachers need to focus on academics but they need to focus on other things too, things that students consider important. Those teachers who pay that extra bit attention to students also become their role models and they really admire them.

J: I agree with Maria that in a Green Zone classroom, students need to feel comfortable to ask any questions and discuss any issue. That kind of atmosphere helps students to learn more easily.

B: What are the things that drive students into the Red Zone that they need to learn to avoid?

M: A student should never be afraid to put their hand up and ask a question. Any student who is afraid to ask questions cannot be in the Green Zone. Students should not put themselves down or feel inferior. That is a sign of Red Zone and is associated with poor self worth and poor self-confidence.

B: Any last thing you want to add to the interview?

J: I think it's important that the teacher, while teaching certain subjects, needs to stop and ask students whether they are following and are on the same page with the teacher. Communication is so important for a Green Zone teacher / student relationship. If that relationship is in the Green then learning becomes easy and fun. If the relationship is in the Green, students feel

free to ask questions. I would encourage students to have fun in high school because that opportunity will not come again. Learning is good but learning while having fun is better. I think that is the secret of Green Zone schools.

- B: Is there anything that you think you might add before we finish?
- J: I'd just like to say that for anyone in junior high and high school you don't know how much fun it can be to get involved with activities and have fun, you'll never be in high school again so take advantage of it.
- M: I would suggest to students that as well as studying they need to get involved in sports and making friends to make student life a memorable Green Zone experience. I was fortunate to have experienced that.
- B: Thank you both so much for sharing your thoughts and experiences with me. You both offered significant insights and powerful strategies. I think they will go a long way in helping other students and even teachers to create their own Green Zone School experience.

GREEN ZONE TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS

Teachers and principals play a vital role in creating Green Zone Schools, as teachers set the stage for the classroom and principals create an atmosphere in the schools where learning and teaching can become an enjoyable and growth promoting experience.

I interviewed a teacher, Corinne and Bette interviewed a principal, Mary Ann Nova for our project. They are an inspiration for children, and a support to them becoming Green Zone students.

Interview with Corinne Winnel (Teacher)

S: Corinne, I'm really glad that you are willing to share your work experiences with me. I was always impressed whenever I heard you share your teaching encounters. Whenever you talk about your students I see a smile on your face. You sound so happy, excitement radiates through your eyes. So when I wanted to interview someone who has learned the art of living in her Green Zone, I thought of you. I am confident your story will be a source of inspiration for many. Can you share with me how you decided to become a teacher?

- C: When I was in my teens I was looking for a summer job. A part-time position became available in which I could teach young kids in the morning and do sports with them in the afternoon. I enjoyed that experience immensely. It brought out my creative side. I found out that I could give to those children what I lacked in my own childhood. It was a very rewarding experience and that's where it all began. It was in those years that I realized that working with children was the career that I wanted to pursue.
- S: What did you study before you became a teacher?
- C: After finishing my Grade 13, I did two years of university in Toronto and then I did one year of teachers' college in the Ontario Teacher's Education College.
- S: How old were you when you had your first job?
- C: You're asking me a question that is very difficult to answer because when I graduated it was a time when there were very few jobs available. In spite of my getting the highest marks in school I could not get a fulltime job right away so I did supply teaching. After doing that for a while I became pregnant with my first child. Then I took five years off and stayed home with my kids. When my children were a little older I got my first real job with the Durham Board of Education and that was fourteen years ago.
- S: How old are your students?

- C: I taught at the junior level. I started out in a Grade 5 class which would make the students about ten year olds. But I taught other grades from time to time.

After teaching many groups of students I realized the junior level was for me because they weren't so old that they had an attitude but they were old enough to understand jokes and care about the class. In that grade the curriculum is meaty enough that one can dig one's teeth into it.

- S: In my clinical practice I meet many teachers who feel frustrated, angry, drained and emotionally exhausted but I always find you smiling when you talk about your students and school. What do you think is your secret?

- C: Despite what happened to me in my childhood I've always been a very positive person. I don't know how I retained my positive attitude throughout my life. I try to look at the positive side of life. I love going to class every morning. I love teaching and I love my students. I give it a lot but I get a lot. I'm so stimulated when they want to share with me on a daily basis everything that's going on in their lives. I get to be so many things to these kids. I'm a so-called teacher but I'm so much more than that. I'm a parent, I'm a psychologist, I'm a social worker, I'm a friend and I'm a doctor to these children. Everyday when I come to school I don't know what the day is going to bring. I know what I have planned, but I don't know if it's going to go that way. Those are just plans. Everyday I

meet thirty little bodies with different experiences. I find it very exciting.

- S: You shared with me once that your students relate very well to you?
- C: Oh yes, the other day my parents came into my class and met my kids for the first time. My parents couldn't believe how happy my kids were. We square danced for them. My kids ran over to share work with them. I try to create a very happy, nurturing and learning environment for these children. My room is very colorful, there are mobiles hanging from the ceiling, posters all over the walls, their work, lots of positive affirmations on the walls for the kids to read. It's a wonderful place to come into.
- S: You also celebrate special days with your children.
- C: Yes, usually one day a month we have a special day where we just do something totally fun. I was telling you about the crazy hair day we had. All the students had decorated their hair. We also do Reading Buddies with smaller children. My children help the junior kindergarten children to read. I've taught them how to be little teachers to these children, how to go in and nurture and care for these kids and read to them. My students get excited about that. A lot of teachers at my school say that they love having Reading Buddies with my class because my kids come in so well prepared and

are so excited. Everything that I do in my class I try to make it meaningful for my kids.

S: What is the reaction of the parents of your students?

C: Very positive. I love the interaction with the parents. I love them coming on a regular basis. We're not supposed to have parents come into our classroom without me calling them first and having an interview but I encourage parents to come in whenever they feel like it. They can come in and take part, I encourage them to come on school trips, to take part in workshops that we're having in the classroom. I never see interviews as some ominous event that's coming up. I look forward to meeting the parents. It allows me to understand a lot more where the kids are coming from. At times, I have lengthy discussions with the parents and they love it, too. By the end of the year we become wonderful friends. Even after students leave my class, parents still come back and talk to me. I just had a parent come back and give me a birthday gift on Friday before I left for Christmas holidays.

S: So you get a lot of pleasant surprises.

C: Those are the things you don't expect. At the end of the interview I can show you the letters I got from students and their parents as I keep them all. They mean so much to me. They help me see that I have a positive effect on my students and I can make a difference. Some of those students come from very dysfunctional

homes. Sometimes the environment I provide is the only positive thing in their lives. I try to make it special for them. They spend a lot of hours with me.

S: You offer them a lot of emotional support.

C: I am always there for them. I offer them a shoulder to lean on. I have an open door policy. I even say to my students who leave at the end of the year, "If you ever have a problem, please come back to talk" and they do, which is nice. One thing I always tell my kids, "I truly care about you" and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. They're never far from my heart, even though I'm on Christmas holidays now. I think about them everyday. I think about their little faces and it makes me feel very warm inside and brings tears to my eyes because I love each and every one of those kids. I'm going to have kids forever. A lot of people's kids grow up and they leave and a lot of women are devastated but I always have little kids in my life and for that I'm very grateful.

S: You were also mentioning that you have days when you make your students feel special.

C: Yes, once a week I chose a student and I talk about that student's special gifts in front of the other students and it's a big self-esteem booster for the child. Everybody claps. I try to build up my kids on a daily basis as much as I can. After two or three months of being with me, my kids are so kind to one another, are polite to each other, and are respectful. People cannot believe

how well my kids get along in my classroom. It takes a lot of hard work but after that work I have a wonderful bunch of nice kids.

- S: Many teachers shared with me the political difficulties they face with other teachers and the principal in their school environment. How do you cope with such problems? How do you stay in your Green Zone in a Red Zone work environment?
- C: What I've come to realize is that it doesn't matter what the political work environment is, it's the same everywhere. There will always be people who will be jealous of new guys, people that will back stab, talk about you and I've come to realize that it is just part of the job. I know what I'm there to do. My priority is my kids. I am there to teach them. The rest does not matter. I ignore it; I don't get involved in it. I walk away from it. If somebody is talking about somebody else, I stay away from that. I will not be part of that. But I am friendly with everyone, I joke around with everyone, I try to be helpful with everyone, I try to be positive. If I hear something negative I try to turn it around and make it positive and people understand that about me. Sometimes it is not easy but you have to stick to your ideals and when you can do it, it works. People see me different from others. I do the best I can.
- S: You seem to have a very positive self-image as a teacher. Did that gradually evolve or you always had that?

- C: It's funny you say that. I never had a positive self-image. People would say wonderful things about me and I never believed them. I think it is because I was put down as a child. I was told I could do better. I was never given any positive feedback so I never believed it. It took me the longest while to realize that I can really do things and do them well. And now when people say something nice, I look at them and say, 'Thank you'. I don't push it away anymore. So I have changed. I can accept compliments gracefully now. Teaching comes natural to me. I am so lucky that I found it.
- S: Can you show me some of the cards and letters you received from your students, their parents and your principal.
- C: Sure, I have lots of them.

Letter from a Parent

Dear Mrs. W:

Thank you for giving Katie such a wonderful year. You are just what she needed. You gave her loving support and you encouraged her to do her best academically. She even wants to be in Grade 4 again to have you as a teacher. I hope you have a restful summer and have fun as well.

Thank you again for being such a great teacher and Katie's "other mother".

Sincerely

Diane

Letter from another Parent

Mrs. W:

Thank you so much for making Elisha's year at school memorable. She has mentioned often how much she will miss you. I am sure you will see her in the halls.

You have made a difference in Elisha this year. She has learned to believe in herself and in what she can accomplish with hard work and determination. Thank you for caring.

Kim.

Letter from the Principal

Dear Corinne:

Just a note to say, many thanks and congratulations for coaching our Junior Girls' Soccer team to the semi-finals this week. Well Done! During these very busy times I appreciate your commitment and dedication to our students. You have been a wonderful addition to our staff. I thank you for doing such great things for kids.

Sincerely,

Katie

Letter from a Student

My Teacher Mrs. W:

YOU

You are so special, so sweet and so kind,
You're worth more than jewellery and money
combined

You're funny and serious, playful and fun,
I don't want to go home when the day is done.

When you teach us you explain it so well,
Do I have to go home when I hear the bell?
I love it when you let us do fun things in the class,
I am learning so much I don't notice time pass!
Some people don't like the homework we do,
But I think it's a pleasure to do things for you
You're a great teacher; I think you're the best
I know I will miss you in my Grade 6 quest.
Amanda

Letter from Amanda's Parents

Mrs. W,

Thank you so much for your time and dedication over the past two years. Amanda has been able to accomplish a great deal with your support and guidance. We will all miss you.
Chris, Frieda and Amanda.

Dr. K. Sohail and Bette Davis RN BN MN

Green Zone Principals

Interview with Mary Ann Nova

B: Thank you for agreeing to contribute to our book, *Creating Green Zone Schools*. We appreciate your time and sharing us with your wisdom and expertise in this area. Can we begin with a bit of an introduction to yourself and how you got where you are today?

M.A.: We transferred all over the countryside with my husband's line of work which has given me that insight into different parts of the country, different clientele, different family groups.

I grew up in a small town in Manitoba, a farm with six hundred chickens and cattle and such. My parents were Dutch immigrants with very little education, who helped me develop the knowledge of what hard work and goal setting would do for you. Throughout my years of teaching I've taught everything from Kindergarten right up to Grade 10 and everything from behaviour assessment classes to working with severely challenged special education children to gifted children. As a Special Education Consultant early in my career, I was frustrated with how some people dealt with children and their families. I had an amazing superintendent who at that point said, "You can change the world if you want to," and that's when I went into administration and I've loved it ever since. I am not your typical principal; I am not the sit down in the office,

paperwork sort of person. I do a lot of hands-on. And some of my hands-on, as you are aware of is with animals. I have a lot of expertise with nature and many of our children have lost touch with nature. We've lost touch with that bonding that a pet can bring. This is my second principalship. This is a school with a lot of heart and soul. It is an open door policy type of school where the principal's office is a place to come in and share good things and sometimes bad things and we deal with it and that's life.

B: Wonderful. Could you tell me how you feel your philosophy has grown and changed over your career?

M.A.: As I go through my career I have become more confident in who I am and more confident in others. I believe that no matter who the person is, a child or an adult, that there is something amazing about them. Sometimes you have to dig down, really deep down to find it but it's there.

What's changed for me is that I don't give up anymore. I will look for the children who don't have friends or are having a really hard time at school, or a hard time on the playground and try and figure out why and see if there is something that I can do to make that difference because if you can help one or two it makes a difference for the entire community, not just the classroom or the school but outside the school.

B: I was prompted to introduce you to the Green Zone concept, because I had observed that you

had your own natural awareness of what makes a Green Zone school. So could you describe some of the characteristics that you would equate with a Green Zone school?

M.A.: A Green Zone school is a school that is very inviting. It is a welcoming school from the heart. When you walk in, teachers, administrative staff, a child will stop and say "Hi" not just walk by. A Green Zone school values the person, it feels good, and it sounds good. That's number one. After that communication is the key, not just for one person but for everybody and the only way that that happens is through a really close school community. At this school we have that - we play hard and we work very hard. Students can come in first thing in the morning or later in the afternoon or at recess and they will see the teachers laughing together, talking about what has happened that morning recess or what was happening at the staff meeting. Students and families know that we are not just a professional community we are a family. We share the joys and we share the pains. We work with the frustrations and we celebrate the accomplishments. That's extremely important. Children are very quick to figure these things out; even if they can't say it in words they feel it. If we as a team are not a true family or team they know it. So when you look at the staff that we have they are together. They work, they're here late in the evenings, and they're here early in the morning. We have time for a lot of sharing, a lot of celebrating. Children see it and

that's the important thing that we are a community. We are the role models. So again to be that Green Zone school, it needs to start from the adults who are your role models and they have to genuinely believe in it. They need to be able to communicate; they need to care for each other. They need to be able to have the same work ethics and play ethics.

We can apologize and that's a challenging thing that many have difficulty with in other schools, an adult saying to a child "I had a really rough day, I'm lost." I've done that and students value that, adults value that. That's what it's all about. I will be the first to say to my staff, "I've messed up. This is what I thought happened, it didn't, I know better now. Thank you for being patient with me, thank you for being flexible." It becomes a problem when the person pretends that they know it all because they are either not comfortable with themselves or too arrogant to admit that they aren't perfect.

- B: As you talked about people acting like they know it all, you started to introduce some of the Red Zone qualities. So can you elaborate more on what are some of the other qualities that you see in Red Zone schools?
- M.A.: In my experiences with Red Zone schools, you have a group of people that spend a lot of time together but refuse to acknowledge other groups or converse with other groups. When they do communicate, they only communicate one way, they're not listening. They are comfortable with the way it's been done in the

past and there is no need for any other change. They're comfortable with what they think they know. And for many taking a chance, making a change is difficult. If people get complacent they no longer regard that one child. The attitude of a Red Zone school is that, 'it's just one child'. A Green Zone school asks, "Why aren't we serving that one child"?

Red Zone schools are not interested in professional development. They don't see it as important for them or for the school in general. They are also defiant of the parents. They believe that certain parents are just troublemakers. Green Zone schools realize that we are not going to please everyone all the time, but the goal is to try and at least understand and make as many changes as you can. You compromise. So that we have a win - win situation. There should never be a win - lose. And as far as I'm concerned at this school we have never had a win-lose situation, some days there are challenges but we certainly work through them.

- B: As the leader of your group, I see you as being responsible for creating the soil in which the seeds grow, so I want to understand your thinking when you took on this principalship in this school, or when you see September coming and you have some new staff, some old staff and some new kids and some old kids returning, what is in your mind about how to create this kind of Green Zone environment?

M.A.: First of all, it depends on the year. The first year of the principalship is doing a lot of observing; it's holding back on the yes's and no's and really asking questions and listening. Because the families have a story, the staff has a story and the stories are different, yet they're the same if you start bringing them together. I don't change a lot in the first year but there are some things that I will not live with. If it's going to tear apart a school as far as it segregates students or segregates certain parents or teachers I change that immediately. An example is our Graduation trip, which was planned to be a three-day event. As it turned out there were a very small percentage of the students who could afford to do a three-day trip so it meant that everyone else would stay home. Well, for me they become an elite group. Maybe because of my background being that poor Dutch immigrant girl who couldn't afford any of that and I had been teased at younger ages. I don't want that for these kids. So we decided that this year, like last year we would do a day activity that could include all students. We didn't have an elite group and all of the graduating group came back feeling as a team. So for me that was important. I also did a lot of role modeling with my *Wildlife Wednesdays* with my animals.

The second year I didn't have to do the same things because they trusted what we had done. I could go a little deeper and I did. We went a lot deeper with the respect profiles. We changed the way challenging behaviour is handled. I don't believe in giving suspensions. Student see

them as a way to have a day off and because many of our families are working families, parents can't be there to supervise their children, so some of the children get to sleep in the morning, they watch television, they eat whenever they want to eat and life is grand for the day. So we put in something called 'suspension with a twist', which means you're in school all day but you owe me a three hundred minute day after hours. So they spend additional time with me in the evening until they've worked off their time. It gives me a chance to get to know those kids who are having a hard time because we talk about what is happening. A lot more communication happens. Teachers do the same kind of things, like shadowing during recess time instead of after school detention or missing a gym period, there is no missing a gym period. These students are spending more time with a teacher so they can get to know that teacher who can get to know the student.

The information sharing at staff meetings is all done electronically with e-mails and memos so the actual meetings can let us get more into the meat of issues, addressing the underlying currents and giving the staff that chance to talk.

The other important thing for me is to know that we care for each other. For me to go into the classrooms and give a day of my administrative time to students and teachers, with my *Wildlife Wednesday* is a way to say, "I'm interested in you, thank you for sharing in my passions."

In June, to be able to take each of my classrooms to my farm and spend the day, along with parents who come and spend the day is incredible. It's also another way of me saying, "thank you" to them and for those children to be able to come and say, "This is great!" To give and be tolerant of each other and listen to each other and be able to share is what it's all about.

B: If you narrowed your philosophy of establishing a Green Zone schools down to one principle what would that be?

M.A.: The absolutely most important for me is emotional intelligence - a true understanding of that person. You can always read the book and get the curriculum. You can always read the policies. You can always call someone if you're not quite sure of what needs to happen next in the procedure. But you can make or break a relationship with emotional intelligence.

B: I agree with you and in talking about relationships, what is your sense of how you support parents and teachers to have healthy relationships because that's critical within the school setting, isn't it?

M.A.: It is. First of all, I know each of the parents and I know each teacher, the spouse, the children, I know some of the challenges that are happening with each of the families - some of our teachers had a rough year. I've had phone calls in the evenings with the person on the other end who just needed to cry or vent and it could be an

hour, an hour and a half. But the next day they're able to go on and that's important. Or someone comes into my office and they'll sit on my carpet cross-legged and you know they're going to be here for a while and they want to celebrate. And you celebrate with them or you listen to some of the frustrations about balancing home and school because our teachers are very, very dedicated and want to be here full-time but need to be home.

For myself and my husband, it's been twenty-six years that we've been married and we've gone through many, many challenges and transfers but he's very supportive and it's another way of modeling. Right now, it's the end of June it's time for me to do more giving than taking at home because I've done a lot of taking so it's time for me to be back there. Families and parents will come to see me. Now, most of them feel comfortable enough with me that they will come in and share some of the things that are happening with them and some of them want confirmation that they are doing the right thing. I'm not a family counsellor. I'm there to listen to them; basically, I'm their sounding board because they're not quite sure who to talk to. They know the door is open. They are very thankful and that's great. I didn't do anything for them but it was what they needed. There are others that will come in extremely frustrated and they need to yell at me and they will. I'll close the door and they'll shout.

B: I would think you are in the position from time to time where you need to help a parent and a teacher resolve a conflict. What are some of the factors that you consider when you approach a situation like that?

M.A.: I need time to look at all the sides of the story and get more information. I spent some time talking to the teacher; listen to that side of it. I usually leave it for the evening; I go back to the farm, puttering out in the barn and grooming horses. It gives me time to think. Everyone has his or her way of sorting through challenges. I'm not a quick decision maker because there is often more to it than first meets the eye. By the time everyone is ready to meet I've had time to talk with people separately and have given them some food for thought. When we meet I have everyone sitting in a circle. I don't have a table as a barrier. I pull in comfortable chairs to make it more like a circle. I'm usually the scribe and I'll write down what's happened in the conversation and then we'll come up with actions and everyone signs it. And we laugh about the fact that, you know, Mary Ann's handwriting or spelling is not great. Generally, it takes more than one session. We work on it, I set up another meeting a couple of weeks later and by the time we have our second meeting things are looking better if not resolved. We have been able to work things through like this so that things do not escalate into major issues.

B: In a sense you have a process that is both practical and respectful.

M.A.: To me, it's important to give people time to mull over the issue. All people want is to be heard. I say to my staff that as a team we're all here for the same reason. We are here for that child and that child is like your child. So a parent comes in upset about their treasure and we need to value that treasure. Maybe the way the parent is presenting the issue is not quite the way you would like to hear it but dig down deeper and push the garbage away and deal with what is really there. Look at the heart and soul and you get there.

B: I think words in systems are symbols because they help clarify messages, so one of the questions Dr. Sohail wanted me to ask you, is about how you set limits on children's behaviour in terms of the appropriateness of their dress with the yellow T-shirts.

M.A.: You like that do you?

B: I not only like the yellow T-shirt concept as a therapist, I really liked the way that you used it on the night of graduation. I thought that that was very psychologically sophisticated.

M.A.: When I was up north as principal there, I was informed by my administrative assistant that there were a large group of girls who would dress inappropriately and the previous principal would send them home and they wouldn't come back for the day. The girls then had a legitimate excuse that they tried to come to school but were sent home. So I was prepared for that. I came with my tacky T-shirt

in their school colours. The first day only three of them tried it and they were totally appalled with idea of wearing lime green T-shirts for the day. We never had another issue again. So the tacky T-shirt has become part of my strategy. When I came here our colours were yellow and red, so we had the 'tacky yellow T-shirts'. It is a way of saying that sometimes we don't dress appropriately because we're just not thinking in that mind frame. We talk about how important it is that we dress for school. It's showing professionalism, it is showing pride for who you are. It could be a student, or it could be a staff member. One of my teachers had on a shorter T-shirt that was fine until she raised her hand and I noticed one of the students give me a quick look. I never said anything but walked out of the classroom and I came back with the tacky yellow T-shirt. I knew the staff member well enough to know she would handle it well. And the students were pleasantly surprised that it was fairly handled.

On the last day of school for graduation we had gone to see a musical and we thought we would do something fun with the yellow T-shirts and a musical number similar to the show. It turns out six staff members had to wear the yellow shirts over the year. I wore it one day; a couple of other teachers did as well. So we put them on and did a musical number for Graduation night. We were communicating that we all make mistakes, we mess up and that's alright, so we had some fun with it. But we are still going to dress appropriately.

B: What a creative way of handling that issue through the year and bringing it to a humorous conclusion at the end of the year. I really liked that.

I wanted to talk also about your passion for animals and about the program at the farm. I think that you have done an incredible job in integrating your passion for animals into the school setting. It's really rather unique. Can you talk a little bit about how you've done that?

M.A.: I grew up on a farm. As a child of immigrant parents, I didn't speak English in Grade 1 and as the years went by I was also diagnosed with a learning disorder. Animals became my safe place. It was a place where it didn't matter how difficult it was to say things or to write things down.

Animals mean a lot to children, too. I've always had animals in the classroom. Not to the extent that I have now but I have always had. I know there is a lot of research that discusses the value of animals. There is so much that our children are going through that different animals hold the keys to. So here at school Peaches, the skunk, starts the year off to help us work on acceptance and judgment. How often do we walk into a group of children or adults and we've already decided that we are not accepting this one or that one. And some are bold enough to be visibly appalled to be anywhere near that particular person. We pull away without even thinking. So when I take the skunk out of his crate, I get that same reaction and I use that reaction to show how we

hurt each other without even thinking. Peaches is that vehicle to remind us to think, look and feel before you make your judgment. Does everyone love Peaches, "no" and that's okay, after you've made an informed decision. It's okay not to like that particular creature or person but you need to respect them. The world is made up of different people and everyone must respect each other. So Peaches has her role to play. As we go through the school year, each week on *Wildlife Wednesday*, I bring a different animal to school and we talk about the value of that animal. We all have value, we all have worth. And from *Wildlife Wednesday* it snowballed. Students who were new to our school who had difficulty with belonging but felt connected with an animal would ask if they could come to the farm and see them. Now I have about ten students that come and spend the day grooming, working together, talking with each other and talking to me. It gives me a really good handle on where they're at and what's happening at school. Sometimes, I come back to school and say to the staff, we need to change this or that because of what I've become aware of. So the farm is good in that way.

Other things that are happening at the farm now are that I do a camp for Special Needs kids for two weeks in July. One of my passions is working with severely physically challenged children. Some are wheelchair bound, nonverbal, with respirators - very challenged children. I started last year with some student

volunteers and they were able to see what the parents go through, what those children go through. The students who helped became advocates for others. They became spokespeople for those who are being bullied or disadvantaged. They think it's cool to be at the farm and they can be who they want to be there.

B: I remember last year how you so smoothly integrated my own daughter, Adriana when she was new to the school. Do you remember we stopped by the school before school started? You had a wallaby, Sydney and Adriana, being an animal lover herself, went from having extreme reservations about going into a new school and meeting a new principal to feeling very comfortable and looking forward to starting at a new school. It was an incredible experience.

M.A.: Yes, I know how challenging that was for her. My son transferred from school to school every year for ten years. He was never with the same group of friends two Septembers in a row. And it was hard. He needed to have confidence and he needed to be prepared. Kyle, my son did not have the luxury of having all of the experiences that this school has. We did it at home. It was hard work because it needs to come from the school.

Here we have Mrs. White, our administrative assistant, to introduce new students coming into the school. She has a picture of Max, the lama and Peaches, the skunk and that gives the

children something to think about and talk about.

B: Thank you for being such a valuable part of our book and thank you for being such a valuable part of my daughter's life. You will never know how much you were appreciated.

M.A.: Well, I'm looking forward to seeing her hopefully for most of the summer at the farm and I am looking forward to seeing her grow into high school. She's had a huge amount of changes happen for her and watching her on graduation night the confident young lady that was there, she's grown up.

B: Thank you so much.

M.A.: You're welcome.

Characteristics of Green Zone Schools

In Green Zone Schools:

1. Learning and teaching become enjoyable and growth promoting experiences for students as well as teachers.
2. Children from all walks of life feel welcome and are not judged and persecuted because of their ethnic, racial, religious, class or linguistic backgrounds.
3. Children with intellectual, emotional, social and creative special needs receive special support and guidance appropriate to their unique struggles and dilemmas.
4. Teachers not only feel respected by students, supported by principals and colleagues but appreciated by the community.
5. Teachers, principals and parents work together to become inspiring role models and provide the best learning opportunity for students. They appreciate that it takes a whole village to raise a child. They realize that children are our best investment for the future and want them to grow up to be healthy, happy, creative and peaceful Green Zone adults who are able to create Green Zone communities around the world.

Creating Green Zone Schools

YELLOW AND RED ZONE SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

In the last couple of decades the number of schools that have become Yellow and Red Zone schools because of the stressful and toxic work, social and academic environments, are increasing. Teachers, parents as well as students are negatively affected by this. Those teachers, who at one stage of their lives looked forward to an extended involvement in the teaching profession, are now looking forward to the day of retirement. Their professional dreams over the years have turned into nightmares. Many of them had never imagined they would lose their excitement and enthusiasm to teach or would get burnt out. One such teacher is Cara who shares the sad story of her school system experience which travelled from the enjoyable Green Zone to the painful Red Zone.

S: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for our book, *Creating Green Zone Schools*. Since you have been a teacher for a long time, I wanted to ask you about your observations and experiences in the educational system. After coming to Canada from Ireland, what made you decide to become a teacher?

- C: I always loved food and fashion so I thought I could teach those subjects. But I had to upgrade my math and science in order to qualify to get into university because I had gaps in my education. So I went to Ryerson, got a four year degree in family studies and from there went to the University of Toronto and got my teaching degree.
- S: What year did you start teaching?
- C: In 1980. I remember coming to Oshawa for a job interview. The principal picked me up from the bus station and as he was driving me to the school, we started talking about literature. He was a great fan of Thomas Hardy as he was an English major in university. We had a nice discussion about different poets and writers in our interview and he offered me a job. Subsequently, I moved to the Durham region from Toronto to teach. At the university I was taught to become aware of racial tensions. I was expected to be culturally sensitive but I wanted to maintain discipline in the classroom also. I remember in one Grade 9 class I had three students of West Indian background and one day they were acting out and I asked all three of them to leave the classroom. After they left I got worried that I might be accused of being a racist as all three were Black but half an hour later the students came back and apologized. That day I realized that they respected me and knew that I had sent them out because they were misbehaving and not because they were Black. Today, however, if I were to do that I would be

worried about being labeled a racist. When I started teaching, students used to take responsibility and understood that what they did was wrong. So much has changed in the last twenty years. I had an incident last week where a student behaved really badly. She refused to do any work what so ever. The students were supposed to calculate the cost of a food item because we were catering a teachers' function and this young woman declined to do anything. She refused to write on the paper because she only had one sheet of paper and she was saving it for the next class and I said, "Fine. You go down to the office." The next day when she came back to my class, she was cross with me, even though she had been asked by the administrator to apologize to me for her behaviour and to complete the work. She came in with a list of demands telling me what I should be doing for her. There was total lack of understanding on her part. She refused to be responsible for her behaviour.

I always believed that one of the responsibilities of a teacher is to help students accept responsibility for what they do rather than always putting the onus on the teacher. In the real world sooner or later they have to take responsibility to be successful. I also find it disturbing that rather than encouraging good behavior, the parents defend their children's behavior. So many parents would rather cover up for their children than be honest. I wonder if parents are poor role models how are the children going to be responsible.

- S: When you started teaching, how were the interactions between you and the parents?
- C: Twenty years ago there were fewer conflicts between parents and teachers. There was more cooperation and less confrontation. Parents used to respect teachers. It is so different now. Parents are far less grateful. Sometimes they are blatantly rude. There are other times the students are so out of control that I feel sorry for the parents.
- S: How was the attitude of principals and the board towards teachers? Was the relationship between teachers and administration cooperative or confrontative?
- C: At that time principals were very supportive because they were considered teachers as well as administrators. There was a team approach and teachers used to feel that the principal was one of them. That feeling has disappeared. Now it is far more adversarial and political. Many teachers no longer feel that the principal is one of them. Now teachers have to have union help to negotiate difficulties between them and administration should there be a problem. Now the teachers and principals have more serious conflicts because principals act more like administrators making sure teachers follow the rules and do as they are told. They are no longer on our side. Several years ago when the Conservative Party was in power teachers were not allowed to strike. They could not negotiate their salaries and working conditions. Such a political environment demoralized many

teachers. The environment that used to be peaceful turned toxic. Teachers worked more in the Red Zone.

S: What were some of the characteristics of those Red Zone Schools?

C: There was a climate of fear. Teachers were afraid that they would be held responsible for students' behaviour. There were more deadlines and more book work, which was quite frustrating for teachers. There were numerous irrational demands made of the teachers and if they were not fulfilled, teachers were perceived to not be 'good teachers,' which was frustrating.

S: Did that undermine the morale of the teachers?

C: Absolutely yes. It got so bad that when teachers were expected to teach four out of four classes they did not have time to go to the washroom and many teachers developed bladder infections. It was horrible because teachers were not allowed to leave the class. There was one teacher who was eight months pregnant. She was criticized for going to the washroom so she went on early maternity leave. It was all very unrealistic.

S: Did you see any of your colleagues going on sick leave because of physical and emotional disability?

C: I know many teachers who took a leave of absence and many more who felt like they were losing their minds. It was all because of the

stress at school working in the Red Zone system.

S: What was the most stressful time for you?

C: When I was teaching the four out of four, I saw over a hundred and twenty students a day and believe me when you are teaching a hundred and twenty students there's no time to prepare or mark. It was horrendous. It was absolutely unbelievable. We all went home exhausted everyday.

S: How did working in the Red Zone colour your teaching experience?

C: It was basically an endurance test. I would say that was probably the best way to describe it. It was very, very difficult. I got up in the morning and just prayed and hoped that I would survive the day. That was the way I went to work on an ongoing basis. I was also experiencing health problems at the time, but I totally lacked any support on the part of administration. It was very, very difficult. I didn't know how long I would survive in that atmosphere. Many of my contemporaries retired as they could not tolerate it any longer. They were afraid if they stayed longer they would have a nervous breakdown.

S: How long more do you have to teach before you can retire?

C: Two years and two months and I'm counting the weeks and months

- S: Looking back at your teaching experience what was your biggest surprise?
- C: This is a very personal thing. When I was teaching at another school I had met a wonderful teacher there. He taught English but the poor man was burnt out and you could see that he should not be teaching any more. He was suffering. After meeting him I had thought to myself that that would never happen to me. But unfortunately that has happened to me. I am burnt out. I realize I should not be teaching. I think that was the biggest surprise. I never thought it would happen to me because I always had a lot of enthusiasm. But over the years it has all gone. The Red Zone system has sucked all my energy.
- S: What are the factors that are still keeping you in the school system?
- C: I feel stuck. I cannot leave on long-term disability because I do not suffer from a major mental illness and even the ones who suffered were not supported by the insurance companies. I know a teacher who had a psychotic episode and she was expected to go back to teach. The school authorities were not sympathetic. She went back and suffered another breakdown. If I retire now I would not be able to live comfortably from a financial point of view so I have to work for another two years and two months.
- S: After working in the Red Zone schools, what would be your couple of suggestions that

would help Red Zone schools transform into Green Zone schools?

C: If I have to make a couple of suggestions I would suggest:

1. To have a democratic atmosphere in schools for the teachers. There should be less hierarchy. Schools need not be run like the military.
2. My second suggestion would be to review the curriculum. The present curriculum is badly prepared. The Ministry of Education said they did not have the money to provide adequate text books and supplies. If the curriculum is bad it makes it hard to teach properly. And when teachers are given faulty tools students suffer too.

S: Thank you very much for sharing your wisdom.

C: You are welcome.

Characteristics of Yellow and Red Zone Schools and Teachers

1. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, the teachers feel overwhelmed by their workloads.* The administration is not sensitive to their emotional and professional needs. They do not realize that teaching is an art and to do creative work the artists have to feel enthused and inspired. Teachers are responsible for transforming young minds and personalities

Creating Green Zone Schools

into scientists, artists, lawyers, health professionals, engineers, and political leaders who are healthy and responsible citizens of the community.

In Yellow and Red Zone schools, the classrooms become akin to the assembly line of a factory and daily work becomes routine and monotonous. In such environments, teachers feel overworked and tired. Finally teachers reach a stage where they have nothing new to offer. Cara shares how teaching one hundred and twenty students a day can become tiring and an 'endurance test' for teachers.

2. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, teachers and principals develop a confrontative rather than a cooperative attitude.* Teachers feel they are harshly judged and penalized rather than accepted and supported by the administration. For teachers to run their classes effectively and efficiently they need the support of the people in authority, especially when there is a conflict between teachers and their students. Teachers want those conflicts to be resolved respectfully and gracefully. They need the principals to become role models for the students as they are the surrogate parents and guardians in the schools.

Unfortunately, in the Yellow and Red Zone schools the principals adopt an autocratic rather than a democratic posture. Rather than serving the schools, they rule with an iron fist. In such an atmosphere, teachers feel controlled, stop respecting the principals and gradually lose their spontaneity and creativity. Cara stated in her

interview, "Many teachers do not feel that the principal is one of them". In such schools the responsibility and authority do not go hand in hand, the principals have the authority and the teachers have the responsibility. In such institutions principals forget that they were once classroom teachers and view the situation solely as an administrator. Finally, the atmosphere becomes hierarchical and the politics of the school system disillusion teachers. That is why Cara suggested that, "Schools need not be run like the military."

3. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, the teachers do not feel appreciated by the parents.* The teachers and the parents do not have a good working relationship. The parents forget that teachers are surrogate parents and are trying their best to help their children learn and grow to their full potential. Over the years, I have witnessed that those mothers and fathers who have not resolved their conflicts with each other become poor role models for their children. Consequently, one parent joins the child against the other parent and undermines the authority of the other parent and the teacher. In such families, children learn unhealthy methods to exploit and manipulate their parents. These dynamics are more likely to happen in divorced and blended families. Even in some single parent families the issue of disciplining the child is unresolved. So those children that grow up in Yellow and Red Zone families not only have difficulty accepting the authority of teachers and principals but also struggle to resolve their

conflicts respectfully and fairly. This is very frustrating for the teachers who have to spend a lot of time dealing with behavioral and emotional problems rather than focusing on academic goals.

4. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, teachers do not have a personal relationship with students, which is crucial for a healthy learning and teaching experience.* If the students and teachers do not have respect for each other, it is hard for teachers to share meaningful information and life experiences with students. Cara shared how one of her students not only did not do her homework but also had unrealistic demands of her the next day. In spite of the principal making the suggestion, she did not apologize to her teacher.

In such schools, teachers and students want to do the minimum to pass the exams. Students as well as teachers do not feel respected as their intellectual, emotional and social needs are not fully met.

5. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, classrooms do not have a healthy social environment.* Students feel as if they are judged because of the gender, religious, class, ethnic or cultural group they belong to. They experience discrimination and there is no mechanism for such discrimination to be addressed. Girls are assaulted by boys, and members of minorities feel vulnerable. Since the September 11, 2001 tragedy, students from Arab and Muslim countries are feeling increasingly vulnerable. One of the Pakistani students whose name was Osama was so tormented in his class

that he had a nervous breakdown and had to be hospitalized.

6. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, teaching and learning are no longer an exciting and enjoyable and growth promoting experiences. Things are done more out of obligation than caring. Activities are guided more by should, must and have to rather than want to, like to and love to. In such schools teachers and students no longer look forward to going to school. When I asked Cara that if she was burnt out why she was still working, she shared that the motivation was primarily financial.*
7. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, the teachers and students do not have support services. If they experience any academic or emotional crisis they do not have mental health professionals to help them cope with the crisis or help in their rehabilitation. Many such students and teachers either come to school in a distressed state or eventually leave the school system.*

In our clinical practice, we have met a number of hard working teachers who were so frustrated with the school system that they experienced anxiety attacks and bouts of depression; as a result they needed to be treated with antidepressants and psychotherapy. Many were further frustrated when they did not receive the support they deserved from their principals and insurance companies when they applied for short term or long term disability. They had offered their services to the school system for years but when they needed help they were declined.

8. *In Yellow and Red Zone schools, the teachers, parents and students do not work together as a team. Each group has their own agenda and their own priorities. The main goal of school - to provide an optimum environment for students - is ignored and side issues take priority. Such conflicts undermine the school system and students do not learn what they are supposed to learn. Either they attend half-heartedly, become dropouts or graduate without being fully prepared for the real world. The potential of students is not fully actualized and for the rest of their lives they are regretful, as their schools failed to perform the duty they were supposed to perform.*

It is unfortunate that more and more schools are transforming into Yellow and Red Zone schools and we as communities are not fulfilling our responsibilities to the next generation. We are not providing the standard of services needed nor are we integrating modern advances in education, psychology or technology.

YELLOW AND RED ZONE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES' FOCUS ON SPECIAL NEEDS

In Yellow and Red Zone Schools, the average students do not receive the optimum nurturing and guidance they need for their growth but those children who suffer the most are those with special needs. Their families feel quite concerned about their children. Candy is one such mother who shared her struggles. She was particularly sensitive to her son's special needs because she had struggled with similar issues herself when she was a child.

Interview with Candy

- S: You are such a wonderful mother. Whenever you talk about your children, I see a special sparkle in your eyes. You have been helping them cope with their emotional and academic problems in school. But before I focus on your experiences as a mother, I want to know about your own childhood. What kind of difficulties did you experienced in school?
- C: In the school, I did not have problems in the beginning but when I reached Grade 5, I found

mathematics, reading and writing difficult. Unfortunately, the teachers did not pick up my problems until I was in Grade 7. Even then they did not do anything special to help me. They sent me to some special classes but those classes did not do any good. By the time I reached high school, I was completely lost. I could not retain information and I could not finish my homework. I just could not survive in the school system. So I failed and the school system failed me.

S: What grade did you leave school?

C: I had just started Grade 11 and things got really difficult for me. I had failed Grade 9 mathematics and I could not pass Grade 10 mathematics. I found exams terribly difficult, as there was always a time limit to do the test. I had a lot of Cs and Ds and never really had Bs or As.

S: What was the last straw?

C: I just felt that everybody was passing me by with their academic achievements and I was left behind. Nobody was helping me to catch up. Other students knew what they wanted to do but I did not have a clue. We were asked to pick courses depending upon what academic future we wanted to choose. When I turned sixteen, I told my mother that I wanted to quit school as I was feeling lost and confused. She was not happy about my decision but she supported me. A few months after leaving school, I tried one

more time but it did not work and I left school again.

S: But you finished Grade 12 later on. How did you do that?

C: Later on, I discovered on my own that I needed more time than others to absorb things and figure them out my own way. So I took courses by correspondence in between different jobs and I finished my Grade 12. I was really proud of that. I had some problems with math but I found a teacher who helped me with that. I used to send her messages and she used to give me detailed directions and that helped me. So I passed with sixty percent average and I felt really good.

S: Were you ever formally tested? Did you ever find out why were you having problems in school?

C: No, not really. I just discovered on my own that I had problems with communication and picking up information.

S: Do you feel you have some kind of learning disability?

C: Yes.

S: At what stage of your life did you decided to have a family?

C: I got pregnant with Jason when I was eighteen and I had him when I was nineteen. It was in my first marriage but that marriage did not work out so I left my husband. Then I started

dating Rick. After dating him for five years we got married and had a small family.

S: How many children do you have now?

C: I have four.

S: How old are they?

C: Jason is twenty one now, Jesse is fifteen. Samantha is fourteen and Rachel is twelve.

S: You told me that Jason used to have difficulties in school. Can you share with me some of the details?

C: When Jason first went to kindergarten I wanted to put him in the French Immersion Program. But after a year his teacher told me that he was having problems, as he could not remember certain pieces of information. She felt he was too fidgety. He could not sit still and his attention span was short. That was the first time someone brought to my attention that there were problems.

S: So what did you do?

C: I took him out of the French program and put him in the English program and he did well in Grade 1. But in Grade 2 he became restless again. He used to get up and leave the classroom. He was also having problems with his homework. I tried to help him. But as he grew older it became harder especially with mathematics as I could not help him. The curriculum had changed and I could not keep up. The Grade 5 teacher mentioned that he was

easily distracted. He was having problems sitting in one place and focusing. At home when I asked him, he would say he had done his homework but in reality had not. Many times he would start but he could not finish. The teachers used to call and complain. When I put pressure on him to complete his homework he used to get frustrated and break his pencils and get angry. He would make excuses. He would go to washroom and stay there for fifteen minutes while I waited for him. For his homework assignments, I used to go to his school and ask for special extensions and the teachers would give those extensions quite reluctantly. The teachers felt it was not fair for the other kids. In Grade 6, the school authorities wanted to put him in a special class as he was far back. In Grade 6, he was still doing Grade 4 mathematics. I thought the school system did not help him cope with his deficiencies. I hoped they would have him tested to find out his special needs and help him to get better marks so that he was not that frustrated. At times he was receiving detentions for silly behaviour. They used to give him homework during detention which he could not finish as he could not sit still and focus. Finally, the teachers met with me and Rick and told us that Jason was exempted from History, Geography and French and he was put in enrichment reading class where they focused on his Reading and Spelling. It was interesting that with the passage of time he caught up with mathematics once he had one to one time with a special

education teacher. He also had to see a behaviour specialist who told us that he had borderline attention deficit disorder.

- S: Do you see some similarities between his difficulties and your own when you were in school?
- C: Yes. We both could not sit for too long and focus on one thing. I needed time to process things. I used to ask Jason to do a little bit at a time.
- S: How did you find Jason's teachers?
- C: Some were sympathetic while others did not care. Once I met with the teachers and asked them to give him projects that he liked. For example, he loved to ride bicycles. So once they asked him to do a project on bicycles, he got A+. That was the first time he did so well and felt proud of him. That made a change in his self-esteem. I used to ask the teachers to be flexible. Some teachers listened to me and cooperated while others did not. I also told his teachers that I had noticed that he was a visual learner. If he was asked to watch a movie and then write a report he did better than reading a book. Some teachers did not cooperate with me and it was very frustrating. We could not work together to educate my son. But I did not give up. I was optimistic he would be okay one day like me.
- S: What was your worst experience with the school system?

- C: It was with a principal who used to send Jason home as he wore a T-shirt that was not appropriate. He would feel frustrated and then he did not want to go to school. The principal was very punitive. He could not work with Jason in a respectful and caring way. He did not have a good relationship with Jason. Jason used to get mad with him. And then the principal put five or six students with attention deficit problems in one class. And it was not a good idea as they made each other worse. They would drum on the tables. There was a young teacher who was new and adventurous. I told her that it might be an idea to give the children some musical instruments so that they could play and release their energy. Since they were drumming on their desk, I asked her to get some drums and let them play. She agreed and the students responded well but then the principal did not like the idea and the program stopped. It was a shame because the program was working and helping students. It was a special program to help students with special needs but the school system could not be creative. They wanted to follow the rules and the routine but those rules did not work with children with special needs. It was unfortunate.
- S: So you felt that isolating him and putting him with other boys with the same attention deficit problem was not a good idea.
- C: No, it was not a good idea because they would just get each other going. They were restless and agitated.

- S: You also had some financial difficulties because of the demands of the teachers and children's programs.
- C: Yes, they asked for extra money for different things that I could not afford. Teachers wanted children to buy expensive books.
- S: What about extra-curricular activities?
- C: Yes, some teachers were quite demanding. Jason was pushed to join track and field and buy special shoes that cost \$89 that I could not afford. It got to the point when he did not want to participate. All other children did well because they had special shoes. I think teachers should treat the rich and poor kids alike and ask children to wear basic shoes that all children can afford. There was also \$80 fee for clothes, pants and T-shirt that I could not afford. I told the teachers that there were ways around it but they were not flexible and my son suffered as he was deprived of certain sports that he could attend. He was deprived of activities because I didn't have the money and the school was not flexible. I did not understand what clothes had to do with sports.
- S: Did Jason finally finish high school?
- C: In Grade 11 and 12, it became really difficult. At one stage they asked him to see a psychiatrist. He was assessed for ten minutes, diagnosed with depression and put on medications. I was not impressed. How could someone diagnose and prescribe in ten minutes. I had tried my best to avoid medications and tried to help him

with psychological methods. I was neither impressed by the teachers nor by the doctors. They were not addressing the needs of my son. I wanted them to help my son to get motivated to learn and enjoy school. There was another assessment that lasted for twenty minutes. That made me angry. We went for so many meetings but we could not work together.

S: Sounds like it was frustrating.

C: Yes, it was very frustrating because whenever I went into a meeting you didn't know what was going to happen. I was always afraid they would bump Jason out of a program because there was another child with more needs. The teachers also told me negative things. One day I asked the teachers, "Why is it that you never have any nice things, to tell me about my son?"

S: How is he doing now?

C: He's doing really well.

S: Did he finish high school?

C: Yes, with the help of the Special Education Program. We all went to his graduation and celebrated. It was a great accomplishment for him. After his graduation he got a job. He successfully finished his apprenticeship for six months and now he is doing very well.

S: What kind of job does he do?

C: He was doing an apprenticeship for sheet metal and right now he can run all the machines in the shop. He knows where all of the connections are

and he knows all the equipment and they're very good to him there. They really like him a lot. They've given him keys to the shop and they've loaned him a generator. He feels quite responsible now. He has also bought a car and treats it like his baby. That is his first car and he is very proud of it. He got a loan from the bank and is now gradually paying it back. All these things are teaching him to take responsibility.

S: How responsible is he now?

C: He gets up very early in the morning at 6 am to get ready for work. When he was in school, he never got up early. We were worried he might do the same and lose his job but he did not. I was so impressed.

S: So in the end it turned out to be a success story.

C: Yes. He's doing quite well. I am proud of him.

S: So your hard work, patience and persistence paid off.

C: I think so, yeah.

S: After going through all the hardships that you went through, what would you suggest to parents, teachers and principals who deal with children with special needs?

C: I think working together with parents and teachers as a unit is probably a major factor for everybody. Having special meetings with all the people involved is important and coming to some agreement. Everybody has the same goal - to help the child grow to his fullest potential.

And that needs team work. I always supported him to do the things he loved in life. His first love was his bike and he learned so many tricks on his bike. I supported that as I wanted him to be happy and enjoy his life.

S: Congratulations on your success as a mother.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR WORK IN THE COMMUNITY

Green Zone School/Workplace Partnerships

When parents send their children to school, they expect them to gain knowledge and learn skills that will help them get a suitable job and contribute to their families and communities. Unfortunately, some students graduate from high school with a lot of information but no skills to find work and also no sense of direction. However, those students who had an opportunity to be part of a co-op program and be exposed to the business world have an advantage. Being a part of such a program increases the likelihood of getting a suitable job after graduation as students make contacts in the community that are useful later on.

Those teachers who are in charge of work placement programs provide a valuable service by becoming a bridge between the schools and the communities. One such committed and dedicated teacher is Barry. I asked him to share his experiences as a teacher and his insights into the work placement program he supervised. Finding a job and a profession one enjoys is an essential step in

discovering one's Green Zone Lifestyle. Barry wrote the following:

During my twenty-eight years of teaching, I have taught various subjects and met thousands of students. I have long ago come to the conclusion that Canada's young people are bright and competent. They are generally idealistic and optimistic, and tend to be positive about attaining their career goals and a comfortable lifestyle. Their career aspirations and achievements exceed those of their parents.

However, the challenges facing today's youth also exceed those experienced by their parents and grandparents. Our youth live in a society where the definition and even the values of the traditional family have changed. They are very deeply concerned about personal safety, acceptance and recognition. While most live in relatively normal home environments, many experience severe stress, and even abuse.

The ever-changing world we live is becoming more complex and fast paced, especially for our youth. Though accustomed to frequent changes at an early age, transitioning from the elementary to the secondary school, and beyond, can be challenging for many young people. The new surroundings, curricula and peer pressure can be overwhelming and stressful for many.

The transition from school to work and from dependence to independence are also proving difficult for many young people today. They lack experience, and feel that our schools do not provide the relevant curriculum and employability skills needed for their success. This perception often results in poor grades, lack of focus, poor attendance and discipline problems. Some students even drop out of school altogether, never reaching their full potential.

Fortunately, there are many excellent school programs which link secondary and post-secondary schools, with the business community. These workplace study/learning programs enrich and enhance the students' knowledge as they integrate school learning with workplace learning experiences.

As a result of their positive community based work experiences, they are better able to deal with the challenges and stresses of school and personal life. Students learn to better manage their time and their lives. Without realizing it, they have left the life of the Red Zone, and begun to learn and live productive lives in the Green Zone.

One such student whose unhappy life changed dramatically as a result of his community based work experience was Jason W. A troubled and somewhat hyperactive Grade 11 student at a large suburban school, Jason often got into mischief and was frequently assigned to the in-school detention room. He was suspended from school on a number of occasions and was at risk of failing several of his courses. He was becoming more and more frustrated and unhappy with his school and personal life. One day while supervising the in-school detention room, I overheard Jason saying to one of his classmates that he hated this place (school).

Jason seemed genuinely unhappy and miserable. He was on the verge of dropping out of school and definitely in need of counseling. At the end of the detention, I asked Jason to come and meet me in the guidance/co-operative education office after school.

I quickly determined that Jason was a bright young man, who like so many of our youth, lacked focus and direction in life. He had a strong interest and knowledge of computers, and was hoping to go to college, "if he ever graduated from High School" which he did not seem to enjoy. His family life was less than ideal; His parents had

divorced when he was thirteen years old. His mother worked long hours and was becoming more and more frustrated with her son's negative attitude. Consequently, Jason spent much of his free time at his friends' homes, or at the shopping malls. He seemed like a perfect candidate for an out-of-school work experience program.

Jason showed great interest in the community based co-operative education work education program. After several meetings and additional counseling, he was sent for an interview with the owner of a computer graphics company. The employer was impressed with Jason's knowledge of computers and agreed to provide a work placement for him. Jason could not hide his excitement, and although the work experience program was still a couple of months away, he promised to behave himself in school, study harder and pass all of his courses. He kept his promise.

Within days of starting his work placement, Jason impressed his employer with his positive attitude and knowledge of computers, and was offered part-time employment with the company. The following day he came to see me in my office, and with a big smile on his face, told me that he'd been offered part-time work with his co-op employer. He thanked me for giving him the opportunity to do something exciting for a change. No one had done anything like that for him before.

Jason continued to work there for the duration of his work study term and received excellent evaluations from his employer. After completion of his scheduled workplace term, he was offered full-time summer employment with the company. He returned to school the next semester, and impressed everyone with his maturity and positive attitude. He became a regular in the school computer lab, and was often seen helping his classmates or assisting the graphics design teacher. His attendance and relationship with

teachers and other students became extremely positive. He enjoyed the newfound role, respect and admiration among his peers. He appeared to be enjoying life and living in the Green Zone.

Jason graduated from High School and went to study graphic design at the community college. He still works part-time at the graphics design company where he first started his co-op work experience program. He occasionally visits his teachers and keeps them up-to-date on his studies and his work. He seems genuinely happy.

I have also met Jason's mother on several occasions. Having experienced much anguish and disappointment during her son's troublesome years, she too had been living in the Red Zone. That has all changed. Now, she is extremely happy with her son's success, and credits his positive attitude and happiness to his co-operative education work experience. Their happiness leads me to conclude that neither she nor Jason is living in the Red Zone any more.

One student's work experience reflection

I was sixteen and, like so many of my fellow students, aimlessly strolling the crowded hallways of my school. I was lost in the modern world of choices, bombarded with suggestions and options, yet uneasy about my ability to step from the locker-lined halls into what adults refer to as the "real world". Many of my peers trudged to class each day, condemning the institution and the strict regime under which each person is expected to find their niche and blossom, but are instead often deprived of inspiration.

I sought a way to escape not only the boredom of a one size fits all curriculum, but also the bureaucracy and politics that dictated what I was to learn. I turned to Co-operative education that was available under the steady

hand of a rare, dedicated individual, who invested many hours and unique guidance in each student. After several meetings, I was accepted into the co-operative education program. The co-op teacher prepared me for the interview with the supervisor of the day-patient surgery department at the local hospital. The interview went well, and I was told that I would be accepted into the program. I was finally getting an opportunity to step outside the school box, and interact with people in what I perceived to be my field of interest. I was extremely happy, and could not wait to begin the work term. When eventually I began my work education program at the hospital, the experience proved to be most rewarding and educational. Not only was the raw work education experience invaluable, but the personal interaction both enlightened and encouraged. I developed many friendships that led to sound professional advice and a window through which I could glimpse a potential future.

While finding confidence within the many rooms of the hospital, I encountered Joan, a nurse well versed in the workings of the institution, both hardened and softened by her many years of experience. She took me under her proverbial wing and encouraged me to get in to the thick of things. And so I did.

Through Joan, and others, I was able to see beyond the day to day treatment and care of patients to the humility and humanity of medicine. I was able to observe and also participate in surgeries, both of which activities fostered in me a deep appreciation for the intricacies of the job. My work experience enabled me to better understand that medicine is not only about the static time frames, but entire lifetimes.

Through surgical observations I encountered women whose fate was determined by the results of a test, men whose families gathered to learn the nature of a cancer's

progression, and children whose burned skin and broken bones were tended to by caring health care professionals.

These experiences changed me in a way I had not anticipated. I became aware of the uncertain nature of medicine, of the unknown and unexpected trials and tribulations after which one is sometimes faced with. As a result I now wake each morning with the knowledge that the day ahead is not as certain as my day-planner would have me believe, and that I need to be prepared for the unexpected. So, although I learned many practical skills relating to surgery and medicine, it was the intangible knowledge and the effects of touching the life of another that changed me the most. The experience has taught me the importance of living each day to the fullest, being flexible and willing to change direction.

The self-confidence that arose to the surface within this non-threatening work environment has allowed me to think for myself and follow my true interests. This opportunity to explore an unfamiliar career safely has given me the courage to pursue a path to happiness, despite what are often daunting challenges. I am now more focused and self motivated. These characteristics are not taken for granted, but are nurtured, a process that was strengthened by having the chance to, for a short while, step out of my generic teenaged existence, into the "real world".

Amy

There have been thousands of similar success stories in schools across the country. The number of students participating in work education programs continues to grow each year. In some secondary schools nearly half of the student population will participate in a work education program, earning credits towards their diploma.

Dr. K. Sohail and Bette Davis RN BN MN

Students, parents and teachers recognize the value of intensive career exploration. Students now have the opportunity to access properly the path directly into the workplace or into the post-secondary program that will best meet their needs.

Guidance counselors and co-operative education teachers work hand in hand to promote and administer the program at the school level. Information sessions for students and parents are generally held at each school. At any point during the school year parents are encouraged to contact the student services department to find out more details of the programs available.

The business community has embraced the work education programs with open arms. Almost all major industries, government facilities and retail outlets offer work education placements to local students. Likewise, small independent business owners provide educationally sound one on one training for students.

The rewards to the business community are quite tangible. Each work education teacher regularly networks with senior employees/supervisors, who are responsible for student's hands-on learning. The benefit to the supervisor in the mentoring process is the reality of teaching and observing a young person grow in knowledge and skills that are job related.

Another benefit to the employer is the opportunity to screen students for future part time or full time employment. The opportunity to hire an employee with a proven track record cannot be underestimated. Work education employers universally feel that as a member of the community they are contributing and acting with civic responsibility.

The work education programs continue to evolve and become diverse to meet the needs of all students. Less than one percent of students participating in the work

education program fail to complete their work term or drop out.

Timely and appropriate counseling by dedicated teachers and employers, supportive parents, all contribute to the program's phenomenal success. In turn, everyone involved experiences tremendous benefits from this participation in work education programs. It is therefore not surprising that the program has become one of the best facilitators of positive change in the schools, businesses and homes of the program participants.

Barry

STUDENTS AND SPORTS

Sports were introduced to the school system so that students could:

- remain physically healthy and active,
- develop a disciplined lifestyle,
- learn to cooperate with others,
- develop team spirit,
- respect rules and authority figures,
- enjoy recreational activities, and
- resolve conflicts respectfully while living in a healthy, cooperative and happy Green Zone. And yet, many sports programs have been transformed into Red Zone experiences because students feel tremendous pressure to perform. Children are becoming extensions of their parent's egos and the competition on the playground is becoming destructive and violent. It is ironic to see parents shouting at their children during a game, "If you don't score a goal you wouldn't get any dinner". This environment has discouraged many students who simply wanted to enjoy sports and disillusioned many coaches who loved to help young boys and girls have fun. Some students as well as coaches are withdrawing because of the pressures and criticisms from parents, in particular and the Red Zone environment in general. John

was one of these coaches and the following is an excerpt from our interview.

- S: I was always impressed by your love of sports. Whenever you talk about it you have a lot of excitement in your voice. Can you share with me how you fell in love with sports?
- J: When I was very young I remember watching a hockey game on TV and telling my grandmother that, some day that's what I'm going to do. And when my father started building outside hockey rinks, I used to go out there and play hockey for hours. It didn't matter how cold it was.
- S: Were you involved in sports when you were in school?
- J: Yes, in school I used to play football and soccer and was also involved in track and field. Outside school I played regularly in a hockey team and I became good at it.
- S: So what kind of team were you part of?
- J: I was a part of MTHL, the Metro Toronto Hockey League. I don't know what it's called today. I was six years old when I joined the team and amazingly, I played with them for twenty years.
- S: You must be really good at hockey.
- J: Yeah, I considered it a God-given gift because as much as I practiced and worked hard it was always fun for me. I thoroughly enjoyed the game and scored goals. I have seen other kids

trying so hard and they just cannot do it and I don't know why it came easy to me.

S: What position did you play?

J: Defense.

S: Who were the players that inspired you?

J: Gordie Howe, Bobby Orr, Guy Lafleur and Yvonne Cormier come to my mind at this time. I used to watch them on television.

S: What about Wayne Gretzky?

J: Yes, I followed his career. He had the God-given talent that's for sure. He was really blessed. He has done things that I don't know how he did them. I don't really have the answer. It just amazed me. He was always on television and I tried to watch as much of his games as I could.

S: What did you find special about his game that impressed you?

J: I always felt he knew what other players were going to do before they did it.

S: That's a great gift.

J: Yes, he just seemed to be able to think that far ahead.

S: When you were involved in hockey, you also travelled with your team. Where did you go and what kind of places did you visit?

- J: I played all over Canada. I also played and traveled in Europe. It was really exciting and great fun. I just loved it.
- S: So roughly how many hours a week would you have dedicated to hockey?
- J: If I count exercise time along with playing time, it would be nearly thirty hours a week.
- S: That's a lot of time.
- J: Yeah, especially when you have school, too.
- S: What happened that you left after twenty years?
- J: In 1977, I was in a really bad car accident and could not play any more. I had an operation and a plate was put in my head.
- S: So how long did it take for you to recover from that?
- J: I had to have two head operations. I'd say, physically - a good year; mentally - it was a long time before I would get in a car.
- S: And how long did it take you to get back on the ice?
- J: I never did.
- S: You never played after that.
- J: No.
- S: But after that you became a coach.
- J: Yes, I coached a lot of teams. I used to coach a female baseball team and also a mental health patients' hockey team. The patients loved to

play. They became so good that they beat the staff team.

S: How old were the school girls that you coached?

J: They were twelve and thirteen years old.

S: And for how many years did you do that?

J: Three years.

S: Now tell me about those three years of experience with coaching girls. How did the parents and the teachers interact with you? What was the atmosphere?

J: The atmosphere was good, it was in an Ontario Housing Project where people didn't have much money, so sports was quite popular, especially sports that didn't cost much money. It was in the summer so it had no interaction with their school. Their parents seemed grateful that somebody was taking the time to help their kids because they couldn't afford to put them in a league. I didn't charge anything.

S: You volunteered your services.

J: Yes.

S: So they appreciated your contribution.

J: Yes. It was a Green Zone experience for me, the students and their families. We all enjoyed it.

S: I have heard from other parents, teachers and coaches that gradually the environment in the

schools and in the playgrounds has become quite competitive and stressful.

J: It's terrible these days. I went to watch some games with somebody down at the arena here in town and I was very disappointed in the way that the parents were acting, very disappointed.

S: What were they doing?

J: Screaming and yelling at their kids in a negative way. It seemed they weren't there for the right reasons. In my opinion sports are to have exercise and have fun. For me sports are to learn to play as a part of a team and enjoy it. I didn't like seeing parents putting pressure on their children.

S: And how were the coaches reacting to the parents screaming?

J: It is very stressful for the coaches these days as the parents are very touchy. They all want their sons to become Wayne Gretzky. The pressure is unfair to the children.

S: Was that one of the reasons that you withdrew from the whole scene.

J: Yes. When the parents became too pushy and demanding I left since it was no longer enjoyable. When it became stressful and a Red Zone experience I stopped coaching. I did not want to deal with the pressures of the parents. It was no longer the game I loved anymore.

S: Were you disillusioned by the whole scene?

J: Yes, I was.

S: How do you think it affects the children?

J: It puts a lot of negative pressure on them. It affects not only their school life but also their home life. These children start living in the Yellow and Red Zones and become very angry, frustrated and unhappy.

S: So you believe sports is to be enjoyed not feared.

J: Most definitely.

S: Do you still watch sports on television?

J: Yes, I watch the playoffs. Because of my other commitments I cannot watch as much as I would like to.

S: When you look back over those twenty years of your life that you were intensely involved with sports what kind of a feeling do you get?

J: I have a lot of fond memories. I vividly remember my very first goal. I remember me and this other guy as we skated over the blue line and he passed me the puck and I shot it into the net and it went in. I've never forgotten that. It was such an exciting experience. I was filled with joy. In those twenty years I also met a lot of nice people and I accomplished a lot of wonderful things. So I'm very pleased with the way it was. I may not have made the NHL but still I got out of it what I put into it. I put a lot into it and I got a lot out. I think it made me a better person.

- S: What was the worst part and what is the most painful memory of those twenty years?
- J: Once I broke my hand and I couldn't play in the final game, which was for a trophy and that really hurt me. I really wanted to play and all I could do was watch. I even tried getting a glove to put on my hand and hopefully get away with it but it didn't work.
- S: What was the reaction you received from the teachers and your family members during those twenty years?
- J: They were good. They were all supportive especially my grandmother.
- S: Based on your experiences if you have to make one suggestion for the students, parents and coaches, what would you suggest to them now?
- J: My biggest suggestion would be just let your children have fun. Let kids be kids. If they cannot make it to NHL, that is okay. Let them have some fun. I didn't make it to NHL, but I had lots of fun. I enjoyed every minute of it. It was a Green Zone experience for me.
- S: Thank you very much for sharing your experiences.
- J: You're welcome.

STRUGGLES OF IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AND THEIR CHILDREN

I have met many students from Eastern countries who have a hard time adjusting to the Western world. When families from Asia, Middle East and Africa move to Europe and North America, alongside the social and cultural adjustments some of them face different kinds of discrimination by the schools and communities in Canada because they are of a different colour, religion and culture and speak a different language. Those students who are severely traumatized experience an emotional and social breakdown. Many of them need professional help. In our clinic, we have helped many such families and students with our humanistic psychotherapy and Green Zone Philosophy. One of them is Harris. He shared the story of his journey in the form of a letter.

Dear Dr. Sohail,

When I first came to see you, I was living in my Red Zone. It took me a long time to visit my Green Zone and then live in it. I had never thought I would make so much progress. During all those years that I was in therapy, you

helped me through the darkest hours. You believed in me when I was not sure of myself at all.

I remember the first time I came to see you in your clinic with my mom. I shared with you my struggles about coming to a new country and coping with depression. I was impressed because you listened to me in a caring and compassionate way. Your eyes showed a genuine concern. You even complimented me by stating that I was quite articulate. I was surprised by your comment because I did not believe it myself. At the end of the meeting my mom asked you if you could help me. You said you were optimistic. My mom looked happy but I could see doubt on her worried face.

The more I saw you in my therapy sessions and received positive energy from you; I could feel my beliefs about myself slowly changing. I remember you telling me, "If I didn't think that you would get better, I would not have worked with you." Those comments were very reassuring. I kept on improving. My only fear was that you would lose hope in me and stop helping me. But that was my irrational fear.

The more I felt comfortable with you, the more I could relate my tragic story to you. I shared with you that I was born in 1978 in Afghanistan. I was the second child of the family. My parents were happily married. My father was an engineer and my mother was a teacher. In 1979, when the Russians invaded Afghanistan through the help of Afghan supporters, the country was in turmoil. During that crisis many innocent people were executed. People were silenced and not allowed to express their views. Before many Afghans recognized the real situation, they were imprisoned.

I lived in Afghanistan during the war and when things got worse we had to leave the country for our own safety. We immigrated to Pakistan where I went to a

private school in Peshawar. It was hard for me to adjust as I missed my friends. Later on I was told that my father was killed in the war fighting the Russians. I was sad but I was silent about my feelings. I did not know what to do, as I was confused.

In September of 1990, we came to Canada. My uncle sponsored us and we lived with him for awhile. I started school in Grade 7 in north Oshawa. The school was quite different than the schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan and I felt different than other students. I was a serious student and wanted to study seriously but for other students their studies and life was a big joke. I was from a poor country and could not relate to the fantasy-land of my classmates. I was trying hard to learn English and my teachers were helping me but other kids made fun of me and teased me. They could not appreciate that I was from a country that was exposed to war and trauma.

Then we moved to the Oshawa south and we lived in Ontario housing that was a ghetto. I was enthusiastic to study hard and make new friends but I could not communicate with others. Once again I felt lost and confused. My values and morals were different than others. Every time I spoke, other students made fun of my Afghani accent. Some of them called me 'PAKI, which upset me. I was discriminated in so many ways. I was unable to defend myself against so many of them. As time passed, things got worse. I felt helpless thinking that there must be something wrong with me. I thought I was a loser and no good what so ever. I was in Grade 8 and felt utterly inadequate and confused. I did not feel safe either. The harder I tried the worse it got. I felt self conscious and humiliated.

I started feeling depressed and did not know what was wrong with me. I did not even know what depression was. My grades were declining and I was putting a lot of

pressure on myself to pass. I was getting frustrated with everything.

There were times I was afraid but I did not want to show anyone that I was afraid because I was supposed to be a man and men were not afraid of anything. I felt ashamed of myself, thinking that I was a coward for being afraid. I was playing the tough guy and I was being challenged for that. To become popular I wanted to be tough. I got into many fights to show that I was the toughest. I gradually developed a reputation for being a fighter. In the depths of my heart I didn't care for being tough but I wanted to have friends and be accepted and I thought that if I was a tough guy I would make friends and be happy and everybody would like me. But I was wrong. It made things worse. I had to wear a mask and not reveal my true identity. I wanted to be accepted and to be accepted by other students I had to act bad as it was not a good thing to be good. It was strange. Bad things were good and good things were bad. Therefore, I had to be bad to be good. I was the bad good.

It was really strange in the school. If you studied hard you were a geek. On the other hand, if you told the teacher off, you were cool. If you showed any signs of intelligence you were a loser. On the other hand, if you were failing you were really cool. So you see, it was a confusing world for me. I was losing track of myself. I was turning into something I did not know. After a while I did not know who I was. I was lost and did not know how I got there. I faced a lot of peer pressure.

At that time, I also had problems at home. My Afghani family was trying to adjust to Canadian lifestyle. Coming from a developing world it was not easy to adjust to the developed world. My religious and cultural beliefs restricted me. It was impossible for me to make sense of things. It felt like a bad dream.

It was also hard for me to deal with my puberty. Other students were comfortable with dating and sharing their affection publicly. I was from a culture where sexual feelings and behaviour are considered a sin and a vice. It is considered morally wrong to have a female friend. My family is also very conservative. They did not approve of my dating in high school.

Finally, the stress reached a point that I could not take it anymore. I collapsed. At the age of sixteen, I was diagnosed with Paranoid Schizophrenia and Depression and was seen by many psychiatrists. Unfortunately, none of them could help me. They put me on antidepressants but they did not help me. Finally a psychiatrist put me on Haldol and I started to improve. It took me three years to get better. But then I stopped medications and got sick again. I became paranoid and psychotic and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. I did not know what was happening to me. I was locked in a quiet room and they tied my hands and feet for three days. I was so paranoid I thought they were going to kill me.

Later on I was put on Risperidone that helped my psychosis and paranoia but then I started sinking into the hellish darkness of depression. That was in 1997. The pain was so overwhelming I did not know how I survived. I used to cry all day long. The doctors tried their best but they could not help. Nobody could. I had to bear the unbearable. I had no energy at all. I could not even think.

Finally, I moved to Ajax Hospital from Whitby Hospital. I even received shock treatment. Even that did not help. I was put on all antidepressants available but they did not help. The pain got so bad that I tried to relieve myself from the pain for good by having a car accident on the 401. Luckily I didn't hurt myself or anybody else. The car was demolished, Thank God, nobody got hurt.

In July, 1998 I came to see you and your nurse, Anne. We worked very hard. I used to come to receive psychotherapy every week. It slowly worked for me. In the depth of darkness, I could see a glimmer of hope. I had given up hope and faith but you helped me restore my faith in myself. Luckily my mom was also supportive. Psychotherapy helped me heal in the last few years. There were times I went three steps forward, one step back. In the beginning the progress was slow. I tried to understand Green Zone Philosophy and practice it. Gradually I moved from my Red Zone to the Yellow Zone and finally to my healthy and happy Green Zone.

As time passed, I learned to grow. The more I grew the more I could cope with life and help myself. Looking back now I would have never imagined that I would progress so much. Right now in 2004, I am much happier and stronger living in my Green Zone. Now I am working five days a week, having fun and enjoying life. Now I am ready to go back to school and finish my education that I left in high school because of my illness.

I am aware that I could not have come so far without your help and support. Now I like to tell anyone who experiences depression, however severe, not to feel hopeless as there is light at the end of the tunnel.

My own experience with psychotic depression handicapped me. I felt like a prisoner without parole but now I realize that the walls around me were illusions created by my imagination. I had to let them go to free myself. Now I am not depressed. I am not even angry. I have forgiven the people who did not treat me with respect and discriminated against me. Now I am happy in my Green Zone. Thank you very much Dr. Sohail for helping me in this difficult journey.

*Sincerely,
Harris*

Dr. K. Sohail and Bette Davis RN BN MN

It is not only the immigrant children from Asia, Middle East and Africa who struggle in Canada and have Red Zone experiences, I have also met many families from Europe whose children spent a lot of time in the Red Zone in school because they struggled with the English language. Parents could not help their children with homework and teachers had great difficulties helping such children integrate into the new system.

One such family was the family of Robert Grimminck. Although Robert was born in Canada, his parents had moved him and his fourteen siblings from Holland. His parents were far more comfortable with Dutch than English. I will share some excerpts from my interview in which Robert highlights his struggles with the school system in Canada.

S: What are your earliest memories of school in Canada?

R: I remember going to kindergarten and my mom was very concerned. She did not want the same thing to happen to the younger children as had happen to my older brother and sisters, so she sent us to a public school. The public system was a little better. The teachers were good, but they still treated us as immigrants who were not very smart. I failed Grade 1 there. Rather than helping me, they ignored me. They did not seem to care whether we did well or not, they just pushed us through the system. They thought we had to work in the fields anyhow. Like my older brother and sisters, I did not get any support from my teachers. Later I

remember we were labeled as a family of slow learners. They never tried to give us a good education.

S: What happened after you failed Grade 1?

R: I believe my teachers thought I was stupid like many other immigrant children. They did not pay special attention to us. Now I look back at that period and remember that I had done some extraordinary things. When I was in Grade 7, I had written a book. It was about human anatomy. I had drawn the pictures by hand of different parts of the human body and had copied the words from medical books to explain the pictures. I had placed them all in a nice binder and gave it to my teacher. The teacher said it was wonderful and showed it to other teachers, but he did not encourage me to pursue my artistic talent. They ignored and overlooked my special talent. Now that I look back I realize that I was very annoyed over that.

At Grade 8 graduation I received a leadership award, to my surprise. Although that leadership award was well deserved I was sent to a vocational school for slow learners. So I started going to a vocational high school, *Sir George Ross* in London, which then only had Grade 10 basic education. I had to travel thirty miles to get there. I really enjoyed that school and performed very well. The teachers were nice. They saw that I and my older brothers and sisters worked hard and we were all at the top of our classes. That should have made someone

think that if the Grimmincks are doing so well, they are not slow learners.

In that school I developed a special interest in photography and decided that I was going to become a photographer. They had a wonderful photography program and I did very well in it. I never did like to get my hands dirty so I did not want to become a mechanic or an upholsterer. I loved taking pictures and it was challenging to my creative abilities. It was a two-year course and I was confident that after finishing that course I could get a job as a photographer.

For the first time in my life, I was happy. I could see my dreams coming true. The following year I was forced to attend the local high school *Medway High* in Arva, because I lived thirty miles away and the school had just built a new addition to accommodate slow learners. I requested to stay at the same school for the second year to finish the photography program. The School Board turned down my request. My parents tried hard, but the School Board did not agree. So I was sent to a different school and my dreams were shattered (Rob started crying at this stage. After he composed himself he continued.) In the new school, there were a lot of problems, teenagers fighting, using drugs, being delinquent and violent. I was sent to a slow learner's class, but the teachers did not know how to teach children with special needs. They saw us as a bunch of farmers who did not have to learn anything. I was very frustrated. I worked hard, but the teachers did not

acknowledge or appreciate my hard work. I got very angry, angry with my teachers and also with my parents for letting me be destroyed by the system. I was angry at the system that it did not let me be what I wanted to be. I had an opportunity to be a photographer, but I was deprived of that: I was so angry that I left school after basic Grade 10. I left my studies prematurely and started working in a factory making bicycle tires in the summer of 1973.

S: How old were you then?

R: I was sixteen at that time. I enjoyed my factory work and made some money. I had no intention of ever going back to school, because there was no hope of a better education. But in my own heart, because of the way I thought, I felt more educated than many others who had more formal education than I did.

S: How was your social life as a teenager?

R: I did not have a social life. I was a very lonely person. I remember an incident before I became a teenager. I was invited to a birthday party and I was all excited. But then an hour before the party my friend called me up and told me I was not allowed to come, because there were already too many children. So I did not go to the party and I was brokenhearted. Interestingly enough three or four years ago when I took my sons to a baseball game I met that friend again. He told me that he remembered that party and he felt bad for all those years for doing that. He did not say why

nor did I want an explanation, but I knew that he felt bad about it.

So I did not socialize much and did not have any friends. When you have a big family your family members become your friends. My mother did not encourage friends. As a teenager we had to walk or bike over to a farmer's house, which had a baseball field. There were no extra cars to take friends back and forth.

S: So you were not only neglected in school, but also felt isolated socially.

R: Yes. I felt a little more isolated because I was one of the younger ones. The older siblings could drive cars and had made friends and started dating. I used to feel quite lonely.

S: You mentioned that you drew in school and also had an interest in photography. At what stage did you become conscious that you were an artist and that the creative side of your personality needed to be nurtured and developed?

R: Actually I never did and I don't believe that I am a real artistic person. I always felt that it was a stage I was going through. I taught myself to play the guitar. I learned to play it well, but then I stopped it. I always could draw and sometimes very well, but then I stopped that, too. Everything I did, I did it very well for a short time and then stopped it. That is what worries me about my writing. You have heard me talk off and on about stopping it. That's because I don't feel confident about my creative

potential. I don't think it can go anywhere. I am surprised that I have been writing as long as I have. I find it hard to see myself as a real artist.

- S: I remember when you had an accident and could not go back to your job. You decided to improve your education. In the new school you met a wonderful teacher who encouraged you to read poets like Rabindranath Tagore and Walt Whitman. Those poets inspired you to create poetry. Tell us about being introduced you to Whitman's writing and philosophy.
- R: When I was taking a Grade 11 English course at the Centre for Lifelong Learning my teacher Sam Morrison who also read Seth told me that if I liked Seth's books I would enjoy Walt Whitman, because they have similar philosophies. Sam wanted me to do a presentation on Whitman. So I started researching him and I started to read his stuff. It was difficult in the beginning, but a few things hit me right away. As I was reading about Walt I also started to draw him. I could feel in his hair the elements of life. I could feel the hardships and the gracefulness in the wrinkles of his face. While I was drawing Whitman I could sense that his eyes were worldly and he was a loving person. I could feel his poetry. So I drew Walt all out and I wrote a poem about him and presented all that to the class during an oral presentation. Sam was impressed. He gave me a mark of 11 out of 10 and I presented my drawing to Sam as a gift as he had introduced him to me. Sam loved the drawing. Reading

Walt Whitman opened a new world for me and I started writing. It all came out and I felt strange. I had not planned it. It was all a surprise for me. It kept pouring out and it is still pouring out.

S: How has that outpouring of creative energy in poetry and literature changed your life?

R: My poetry connected me to the world. In one sense it connected me to you. I remember the dinner when you read my poetry and told me it was wonderful and gave me a few suggestions. I then sent my poems to other poets and I was surprised by their responses. I was ready for negative responses. I wanted someone to say to me, "Rob! It's terrible. You might as well give up writing." But they did not say that. They all encouraged me and gave hints to make it better. They were all extremely helpful. I wondered why they would encourage a nobody. And then I started enjoying writing and I saw my philosophy being expressed through my poetry. I would read my poems to ordinary people and they liked it, too. Whenever I did lectures on illiteracy I incorporated poems into my presentations and people raved over them. They loved my poetry and I came to realize that there was something more to my poetry than I had originally thought.

S: So you were surprised when you touched the hearts and souls of ordinary people with you poetry?

- R: Yes, I was, because I am not always touched by other people's poetry. I was touched by Walt Whitman, Tagore and by some of Earle Birney's work. For example, his poem "David" touched me. So I was surprised when I touched other people's hearts.
- S: You have talked about an inner child in your poetry. Tell me about him.
- R: I firmly believe that my inner child was never developed or nurtured in a healthy way. Being brought up in a large family that had neither the time nor the caring attitude, made family dynamics difficult for me. So the academic and creative aspect of my personality never had an opportunity to develop until just recently.
- S: In the end, I want to ask about your dream. In a poem, you wrote. "Sometimes all we have to do is dream a different dream and really believe it will come true." Tell me about your dream.
- R: I always had dreams and I tried to make them come true, because they were not unrealistic. If I were going to dream about being a brain surgeon it would be unrealistic, but after my industrial accident I dreamed of going back to school, which I did. Receiving my Grade 12 diploma was the fulfillment of that dream. I not only received education myself, I was also instrumental in changing the law that all adult learners have the right to a high school diploma. My dream helped other peoples' dreams come true. Even in college, I had become one of the top students. When I suffered from the accident

I had the choice of just lying in bed doing nothing but whine and complain. I had every right to suffer and complain. My doctor told me that my injury was so serious that I could have been crippled for the rest of my life. I could have easily taken the martyr's path and been pensioned off permanently, but I chose another way. I went back to school and my wife, Teresa helped me. She encouraged me and I succeeded.

- S: When I look at your dedication and commitment and accomplishments I feel very proud. I know that there are millions of people in Canada and all over the world who are illiterate. I believe that your story will be a source of inspiration for all of them. I believe that your dream can become the dream of millions of others. I feel very optimistic about your future.
- R: The last time you encouraged me like this and supported me, I felt inspired to write a poem called, 'A Voice' that I want to share with you.

A Voice

*The cries of millions reach out
And I have become their voice
I stand literally naked
In front of the world for all to see
To be judged perhaps mocked
To tell my most secret secrets
A silent soldier fighting a silent war
Where the pen is mightier than the sword.*

Robert Grimminck has received a number of awards because of his achievements and contributions. He has been invited to many schools as an inspirational speaker, inspiring many people all over the world.

I feel Robert's story not only highlights the struggles of immigrant families and the school system but also brings to our attention that creative children have a hard time adjusting to traditional schools because in traditional schools they are often judged rather than supported, penalized rather than appreciated. Robert's story inspired me to study the biographies of other people with creative personalities and to write a book about the psychology of creative personalities entitled, *From Breakdowns to Breakthroughs*.

While reviewing the biographies of famous scientists, artists, mystics and philosophers, I was amazed that as children and teenagers their parents were told by their teachers and principals that those children suffered from learning disabilities, behavioral problems and personality disorders because of their unconventional thinking and nontraditional lifestyles. Creative children and teenagers have remained a challenge for traditional schools. Robert Grimminck was fortunate that in spite of earlier Red Zone experiences, later in life, with the help of a caring teacher and the support of dear ones he got in touch with the artistic side of his personality and discovered a Green Zone lifestyle.

Acknowledging Robert's creative contributions, acclaimed author and poet, Jane Urquhart wrote, *What you have been able to accomplish in the past few years is truly wonderful and must be enormously gratifying to yourself and those who love you. I*

also find it very moving that you not only discovered the joy of reading and writing, but also that you have put that joy to creative use.

Renowned Canadian author, June Callwood wrote about his book, *To Dream a Different Dream*, "The book itself is a miracle." While the Governor General of Canada, Romeo LeBlanc wrote, "What you have done in such a short time is absolutely astonishing and is a telling tribute to your positive outlook on life and the constant effort you invested to achieve your dream."

HELPING YELLOW AND RED ZONE STUDENTS

It is unfortunate that many Yellow and Red Zone students with special needs never receive the unique help they require. They can be labeled, judged, ignored and neglected. Such judgment and neglect affects their self-esteem and they grow up as teenagers and adults with poor self-confidence and self-worth. They often spend their lives in unhappy and miserable Yellow and Red Zone situations. They never get in touch with their hidden talents nor realize their full potential - that special gift nature has given them. But then there are some fortunate Yellow and Red Zone students who find those extraordinary people who give them the attention they need to bring out their best. One such student is Mary who was told by her teachers that she had a *learning disability*. Fortunately, she was introduced to Leslie who worked with her as a tutor for a number of years and produced wonderful results. I interviewed Mary and also asked Leslie to share her observations and experiences hoping that other students like Mary would find teachers like Leslie. The key is in finding that one to one tutoring that brings out the best in students.

S: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for our book, *Creating Green Zone Schools*. I was so impressed by your progress that I wanted to record your story so that it may inspire other students, their families, teachers and volunteers. Can you tell me how old were you when you started school and what it was like for you?

M: When I started kindergarten I was about six years old. In the beginning I had great difficulties. I couldn't do the alphabet. Then I went to Grade 2 and it was harder. I did not want to go to school at all. I was also having problems with my friends.

S: How did you feel in the classroom?

M: I did not know what the teacher was saying. It was all a bunch of words that did not mean anything. I used to get confused and frustrated. I wanted to get help but there was nobody to help me. The teacher had to teach the whole class and could not just focus on me.

S: What was the hardest thing for you?

M: I could not pronounce words. I couldn't spell or sound out words. So figuring out sentences was hard, too.

S: So how did your family and teachers try to get you help?

M: When my family and teachers noticed I had a problem they got me involved in a program for children with disabilities. It didn't work because it was a computerized program and I needed help from a teacher.

S: So then you got a volunteer teacher who wanted to help you and give you that special attention you needed.

M: Yes, then I met Leslie. She is like a friend. I can talk to her about anything. I can tell her what I do not understand and she will explain it to me. The best thing is she listens to me and wants to help me. First, she helped me to read better, then do Math and now she is helping me with French.

S: How often did you see her?

M: She came once a week on Thursdays for an hour. She also helped me prepare for tests and do my homework. She talked to me about how I was feeling and helped me with that.

S: So you had a good relationship with her.

M: Yes, very good.

S: Do you feel that by helping you with school it also helped you build your self-esteem?

M: Yes, it did. It took two years but it helped a lot. There was a time I used to look at the teacher and start crying. Now I don't do that anymore.

S: Are you developing self-confidence now?

M: Yes, I am. My teacher told my mom how much I have improved. I don't worry now if I make mistakes. I learn from them. I think we all make mistakes.

S: And your parents are supportive of you getting this extra help?

M: Yes, they are. They used to want to help me but I did not want their help because I did not think I had a problem. But now I know I have a problem and I need help.

S: Are you optimistic about the future now?

M: Yes, I am. I am developing new interests, poetry and art and drama.

S: And how are your marks now in the last year?

M: My marks have improved in the last year. I have not failed any tests. My average used to be fifty percent. Now it is eighty percent.

S: That's very good. It sounds impressive. You seem to have come a long way.

M: Last year in Grade 7, I was on the honor role three times. My average was eighty four percent. I was so proud of myself. And it was all because of Leslie's help.

S: That is wonderful. Do you know any other children with similar problems?

M: Yes, there are other children struggling like me. They do not have any self-esteem. I want to help those children. Some of them have problems at home with their parents. They need extra help from a special teacher.

S: You seem to be fortunate to have Leslie in your life.

M: I like her a lot. She has helped me with school and with my self-esteem. Now I am learning

French because for some good jobs you need French.

S: You are fourteen, now. So what do you dream about doing when you grow older?

M: When I grow older I want to be either a police officer or a therapist because I want to help other people.

S: Good. So what will be your advice to other students who are having similar difficulties?

M: My advice to those students is just not to give up. Keep on trying and working hard and one day you will succeed. If you need help don't hesitate to ask for it. Don't drop out. Keep on trying until finally you get it. And then you will be proud of yourself.

S: Thank you very much for sharing your story with me.

M: (had a proud smile on her face)

When I spoke to Leslie, Mary's tutor, she made these comments.

From the beginning, Mary impressed me as not only a compassionate and sensitive girl, but also as observant and intelligent. Her mother and I intervened in school when Mary objected to being forced to do a drill and practice computer program in Mathematics and English. Instead, Mary learned her time tables on her own and kept up an ambitious reading program of at least a book a week. We really enjoyed each other and I always felt good after tutoring. This was the best of all situations - no reports to

write, a supportive family, a keen student and uninterrupted time. Pretty soon Mary passed and then surpassed her classmates. She earned a spot on the honor roll plus accolades for participating in many school activities.

Mary is now in Grade 8 and she amazes me by the questions she asks, the challenges she embarks on and her assessment of situations. She saw the movie and read the book, White Oleander. After that, she wanted to discuss the mothers' motivation for various actions. Last week we did a project on Hitler and she was very interested in the lies he used to develop his theory of Aryan Supremacy. Even when she is obviously tired from a challenging day at school, it is a pleasure to share ideas with her and to see her come out of herself to discuss academic ideas. She is also busy with cheer leading and the basketball team. Mary likes to go all out for school activities and she is lucky to have parents who also support her extracurricular activities. Now when things are not going well with a teacher or student, Mary sees the big picture and understands and empathizes with the challenges that that person is facing. She always knows who is struggling with what issue.

I am sure that Mary will continue to thrive in her Green Zone with her great work habits, supportive family and keen desire to do well.

CREATING GREEN ZONE SCHOOLS AT HOME

In the last few decades there have been an increasing number of parents who are disillusioned by the traditional school system and are trying alternate methods of teaching their children. They are committing more time and energy to their children's education and opting for home schooling. Although there are still many skeptics who are against home schooling, the number of parents who are open to the idea are increasing. John Taylor Gatto in his article "Against School" in *Harper's Magazine*, September 2003 wrote, *"Do we really need school? I don't mean education, the forced schooling six classes a day, five days a week, nine months a year, for twelve years. Is this deadly routine really necessary? And if so, for what? Don't hide behind reading, writing and mathematics as a rationale, because 2 million happy homeschoolers have surely put that banal justification to rest. Even if they hadn't a considerable number of well-known Americans never went through the twelve-year wringer our kids currently go through, and they turned out all right. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln? Someone taught them, to be sure, but they were not products of a school system, and not one of them was ever "graduated" from a secondary school."*

Dr. K. Sohail and Bette Davis RN BN MN

I met one such parent, Donna McNeil who believed in home schooling and asked her if she would share her dilemmas and dreams and she gracefully agreed. This is a portion of our interview.

Interview with Donna McNeil

- S: Donna, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for our project on *Creating Green Zone Schools*. I was quite fascinated when I heard your story that for a number of years your creative children did not take part in the traditional school system and were involved in home schooling. Can you share with me how you decided to do home schooling?
- D: When we started the experiment in 1989, home schooling was not accepted and as prevalent as it is today. We had our son in a private Christian school. He was doing quite well in Kindergarten, the first grade and even second grade was okay but we found that he was basically memorizing the answers that he would need to pass a test to get a good grade but wasn't actually learning how to think. He was not even retaining that knowledge so that he could then use it as a life skill. We were becoming increasingly frustrated. We thought, he is just a child. It wasn't for him to find the answer. We had to do something as parents. We wanted him to learn skills that he could use in his life. When we talked to the teachers, the principal and the administration, we kept running up against a brick wall. They said, "Your son is getting good grades. What are you

worried about?" It was very important for us that he learned to be able to think for himself and not just memorize things for a test. You can memorize a rap song, a new age song or whatever you might hear on the radio again and again. But that does not help you in life. We wanted him to be able to think. The teachers told us, "We are the teachers. Let us worry about it. You just make sure he gets here and help him with homework. You shouldn't be concerned about anything else." We did not know what to do. It was a mysterious coincidence that I talked to my chiropractor and associate who were involved in home schooling. I had never heard of that. They invited us to their house to see how it works. When we saw it in practice we were very impressed. I went there with an expectation to see a bedroom turned into a classroom but I didn't. What I saw was a lovely lady, Mandy with a baby on her hip, cooking dinner on her stove, and at the same time helping her daughter look for a word in the dictionary. She was helping her daughter learn how to spell the words. While the daughter was busy with the dictionary she was sharing with me the benefits of home schooling. She told us that the parent learned as much as the child in home schooling. We thought it was a win/win situation. After that meeting a light bulb went on in our minds. We asked ourselves, why are we paying tuition fees to send our son to a school that is trying to fit him into a mould that we don't want him to be in? Mandy loaned us her books to read. We discovered that there

was an elaborate program for home schooling, a curriculum prepared by many publishers. They sent lesson plans to parents and children. It was all laid out there. After I read all that, I realized I could do it. So we took our son out of school before the end of the year. So our experiment with home schooling started with the suggestions and materials provided by Mandy.

S: What was the reaction of your friends and relatives?

D: We met great opposition from our family, the school as well as the community. No one in our neighborhood was home schooling. Some thought it was illegal. Others thought we would be ruining the life and future of our children. They were concerned that our children would not be able to relate to other children and adults. So there was a lot of trepidation originally but there was also great excitement for our son. Basically he loved it right from the very beginning because he has a very inquisitive mind and he is a very active and creative boy. I was a bit secretive for the first year but then I realized I could do it.

S: So you were still in the closet for the first year.

D: Well, I had the door cracked open but I was looking to make sure that nobody was watching too closely, just in case I had misinterpreted the law. But then we connected with other families who were home schooling. After going to curriculum sales and meeting other families who had been doing it for years and

networking, we got more and more comfortable. We kept seeing amazing changes in our children. Our youngest was three years old at the time that we brought our son home. She wasn't officially in school at all but she used to sit underneath the kitchen table and play very quietly with her toys and absorb what she was hearing and one of the things that we loved about home schooling was that we could use any method that we wanted to help them gain knowledge. For our son and daughter both, the most effective medium of learning was music as they were creative children. They both played instruments and that was just a way that they could be reached and retain material very well, so one of the items that we found was called grammar songs. They were just short little songs about nouns and verbs with very catchy up beat rhythms and so our son was learning those and just growing by leaps and bounds in his knowledge, but what ended up happening was this three year old was also learning them at the same time. We would take her shopping and she would be in the grocery cart and we would be going through the store and she would be singing about nouns and verbs when she was three years old. The songs were written in such a way that they were very easy to understand. So when the time came that she was officially being introduced for the first time in the first grade curriculum to nouns and verbs we had to spend only five minutes on that and then she knew it for the rest of her life.

S: So your daughter never went to Kindergarten and regular traditional school.

D: She did not go to school until she was in junior high and then she went to a private school. She was very bright but she did not fit their mould as she had learned how to think for herself. They tried to basically un-school her from what we had taught her and that created some friction and tension. She did not accept something just because the teacher said it was the truth. She challenged them and the teachers were not happy with that. They were rather uncomfortable.

S: For how many years did you do the home schooling?

D: For seven years and it was a time of great learning for all of us.

S: In those seven years, what was your regular day and regular week like?

D: I used to get up about an hour or maybe even two hours before the children would wake up so that I could have a little time alone. And then I would get them up and they would have breakfast and then do whatever chores they needed to do for the animals as we had a dog and a cat. So they would take care of their chores and then I had a planning book for the first couple of years. Gradually, I learned I did not have to follow it. In the last three years I just used them as a reference.

Since my children were five years apart, I was teaching Grade 2 to one and Grade 7 to the

other. They would come up and pick up the sheet for the day and know exactly what we were supposed to do for that day and that week. Usually we were finished by eleven thirty. They were short school days. Then they practiced their music and played piano. In the afternoons we would do some sort of activity that fell in line with what we were studying at the time. If we happened to be studying gardening and plants and how they grow, well then, in the afternoon we spent some time in the garden. When we met other home school families, we all went to museums and aquariums together to get the group discount. It was wonderful.

- S: You mentioned an experience when your children saw a wagon and met the driver.
- D: That encounter took place just about the second year that we were home schooling and studying about the pioneers and reading the biographies of Native Americans and what they went through when they had to leave everything on the East Coast and go to the West Coast on their wagons. One day we visited Claremount, which was about ten miles from our home. On our way home we saw in front of us a wagon train being pulled by a horse. That was not a normal site in our town. So I pulled up my car beside the man, rolled down the window and started to chat with him. I still remember his name was John. He was an interesting character. I think he had a dog with him and he told us that he had started in Maine and that he was going to cross

the country just as the pioneers did. Everything that he had was in his wagon. And it was not a huge wagon, it was one of the smaller sized but it was an authentic wagon just like the Natives would have used. As I was talking to John, my son and daughter's eyes were getting very big with excitement. I asked John if he would like to follow us home and have lunch with us. He said he would be thrilled to do that. So he followed us home and talked to us about his trip and what he hoped to discover about the country and himself on this trip and then offered to take our son for a ride in the wagon. Our daughter was too small and a bit nervous. So he took our son for a ride and he just has never forgotten that. It was the kind of experience that you can not do if you are rushing to meet the bus and you're on the school's schedule. In home schooling one can also take children to see a doctor or a dentist when it is most convenient.

S: What about exams at the end of the year?

D: Every state has different laws for exams as they have different laws about home schooling. In some states, you need to have a portfolio of the students work and have it reviewed by your local board of education at the end of every year. Other states are more involved on a quarterly basis. But in our particular state we had a choice, we could either submit a portfolio or we could simply submit a standardized test. Many home schooled families aren't thrilled about standardized tests in general but our children, and not just my children, but the vast

majority of home schooled children score far above and beyond anything that the public schools could hope to achieve. So it was easy for our children to do the standardized test. It became almost like a fun day for them because it was a day that we would entertain them after the test. We needed a teacher with a college degree to perform the examination, as I, being a parent, was not allowed to give them the test. The children did the test and then we took them for a picnic. They scored in the ninety percentile. Those results showed us that our children were not only learning but also retaining and enjoying.

- S: Over the years, did the attitude of friends, relatives and teachers - the ones who were critical in the beginning change?
- D: Most of them have really changed their attitude not only towards us in our home schooling but towards home schooling in general. One of the people with probably the biggest change would have been my older sister who was a teacher. When we first started home schooling, she was not married and she did not have children. She had her Masters in Mathematics and she had been a teacher for ten or twelve years. She had taught everything from Kindergarten to high school and she was adamantly against home schooling. She thought parents were being reactive to the traditional school system and the children were going to pay the price. Since that time, watching us and watching our children and watching other home-schooled, she has

been doing home schooling herself as she is married and has her own family now. The way Mandy inspired me, many others have found me a source of inspiration and I have helped them start home schooling and they all love it.

- S: You were sharing with me that your daughter recently graduated.
- D: Yes, she graduated from high school. Her graduating class had two hundred and thirty-six students and she graduated in the top ten. That was a very proud moment for us when she stood up there receiving her honors scroll and she has been accepted to every college that she has applied to. When she first came into high school, they knew she had been home schooled and in some areas she was so skilled that her teachers gave her the credit. They said, "You don't need to take this class, you already know this." So she got a couple of credits even without ever taking the class. Her teachers said she was very creative, she was not afraid to say what she thought, she was involved in the discussions in the classrooms and it was just a pleasure to have her in the class. So she graduated and got a scholarship. Actually she was offered several scholarships but the one that she accepted is to university and they offered her thirty-one thousand dollars a year for the four years and it feels very satisfying to think that this wonderful university with such a great reputation is paying her to attend school there. That's very exciting for me personally and for my ex-husband as well.

- S: Tell me a little bit about your daughter's creative interests and passions.
- D: She loves to dance and sing and act. One of the things that we did when we were home schooling was not to let them watch too much television so that they could play and use their own imagination. She used to create a story and its characters and then play those characters herself. She loved to sing and act. I think all children have creative imagination but traditional schools do not encourage it, rather crush it. I think television also stunts children's creativity. In high school, she received what is called a Triple Award, which basically goes to a student who can sing and dance and act. She is wonderful on the stage. These days her favorites are Broadway show tunes. She loves to do those and the people at the high school where she attended, loved them as well. When she goes on the stage, she lights up while off stage she is very, very shy. But when she speaks socially, she is quite outspoken, quite honest, and like many creative people, sometimes too honest. You never have to wonder what Amanda is thinking because she will tell you whether you agree with her or not.
- S: What is she planning to pursue at university?
- D: She is looking at a double major. She does want to pursue theatre. She also wants to pursue music. She has been playing the piano since she was six years old and she has played in front of audiences since she was probably six and a half.

She has competed in tough competitions and won awards for her piano performances, as she loves to play. She also wants to study psychology. She studied that in high school and liked it. She wants to work with autistic children. Maybe one day she will combine her love for singing and her interest in human psychology.

- S: Before we end the interview, is there any other observation or experience you would like to share about home schooling?
- D: I believe every child is unique and we need to find a special way to teach every child. We have two children and we found that their styles of learning were different so we respected that. We did not force our daughter to learn in the style of our son or our son to learn in the style of our daughter. Otherwise, we would have had the same problems that children have when they are in a traditional school. One thing I loved about home schooling was the flexibility. The most special time that is held dear in my heart is when my mother-in-law was dying from lung cancer and we had the flexibility to go down and visit her much more often than other members of the family did. We were there the very last day of her life on this earth. We went down and visited her. She was in a lot of pain. She seemed to be going back to a fetal position and yet that afternoon she was able to hug each of the children and tell them that she loved them. After we left, we got the call that she went into a coma and she died that night.

Had we not been home schooling we would have had to choose how much time the children could miss from school and not be in trouble. Because of the home schooling we could put the book learning on hold for a little while and spend more time with a loved one when we needed to do that. So I think the benefits of home schooling to the family are more than the actual book knowledge and more than the ABC's. Both of our children had richer life experiences because of home schooling. Children learn to be self-motivated and home schooling parents have to be motivated, too. They need extra dedication and commitment to their children and family life than when they are attending a traditional school.

- S: It seems you created a Green Zone School in your own home.
- D: Yes, it was a wonderful experience for all of us. If I had to, I will do it all over again.
- S: Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts and experiences.
- D: You are very welcome.

STRUGGLES OF CREATIVE CHILDREN

Creative Children, Traditional Families and Schools

While reading the biographies of creative people, I became aware that many of them had great difficulties coping with the traditional families and school systems in their childhood. Children with creative personalities have unconventional thinking and nontraditional attitudes and as a result feel quite frustrated with the institutional setting of schools. They wanted an environment where they could be spontaneous, express their creativity and explore their potential. They feel suffocated in traditional systems. The more schools were controlling and regimented, the more they feel their wings being clipped. Some of those creative children endured and tolerated those restrictive environments while others challenged authority. In many cases, they were subsequently rejected and expelled from those institutions, or withdrew into their own private worlds to keep peace.

Many traditional parents and teachers also experienced great difficulty coping with their creative children. Some of them feel so disappointed that they finally gave up. They often feel guilty as parents. It

was only years, even decades later when those children became successful adults and well respected in their fields, whether as:

- scientists or artists,
- poets or philosophers,
- musicians or mystics,
- actors or athletes,
- reformers or revolutionaries

that their teachers, parents and families appreciated their talent and worth.

I strongly believe that parents and teachers need to be sensitive to the creative needs of all children and especially of those who have creative personalities. These children prefer to follow the trail of their hearts rather than the highway of tradition. If their creative efforts are supported, encouraged and appreciated, then those trails become the highways for the next generation. I encourage parents and families to feel proud, rather than embarrassed, of their creative children who challenge the traditional norms, and water the creative plants of their struggles so that one day they can enjoy their creative fruits.

During my studies I came across a number of people with creative personalities who found themselves in conflict with their educational institutions and misunderstood by their parents and teachers. The well-respected mystic poet of the nineteenth century, Walt Whitman and the world famous twentieth century scientist, Albert Einstein are two examples that highlight this issue.

In my book, *From Islam to Secular Humanism* I discussed the creative personalities of mystics and discussed the life story of Walt Whitman in these words,

"When we study the life stories of mystic poets we become aware that many of them led simple lives. Because of their aptitude and personalities they did not fit into the formal educational systems and traditional institutions of their times. They were the students of the University of Life and learnt from their own experiences. One such example is Walt Whitman, a mystic poet of the nineteenth century, who has influenced twentieth century American literature more than any other poet. Although his poems from his collection, Leaves of Grass are taught in colleges and universities all over the world, he himself did not do well in school. His teacher, Mr. Benjamin Halleck, was so disappointed in him that he told his father, 'This boy is so idle. I am sure he will never amount to anything.'

Whitman's father, agreeing with the teacher, took him out of school at age thirteen and asked him to work in a printer's shop. Even at work he was so preoccupied with his soul-searching that his employer thought he was devoting himself to 'the art of doing nothing'.

Teacher, employer and father as well as many other people, failed to realize that Walt Whitman was trying to contemplate and meditate upon the mysteries of life from a very early age." (Ref.1, p.136)

They could not appreciate the invisible labor that all creative people have to do before they deliver their masterpieces. Victor Hugo once stated, "A man is not idle because he is absorbed in thought. There is visible labor and there is invisible labor." It is sometimes hard for artists and writers to explain their creative homework to traditional people who are not sensitive to the dynamics and workings of the creative imagination. For artists, play is meaningful and not viewed as wasting time. That is when they create.

The second example is of Albert Einstein, who was born in Europe to a Jewish family but was sent to a local Catholic school. Like Walt Whitman, he also did not do well in school and was considered to be a slow learner. His biographer, Ronald Clark wrote, *"The one feature of his childhood about which there appears no doubt is the lateness with which he learned to speak. Even at the age of nine he was not fluent...he would reply to questions only after consideration and reflection. His parents feared that he might be subnormal, and it was even been suggested that in his infancy he may have suffered from a form of dyslexia."*

Clark wonders whether Einstein had been just shy rather than dyslexic as suggested by his son, Hans Albert who says that his father was withdrawn from the world even as a boy—a pupil for whom teachers held out only poor prospects. This is in line with the family legend that when Hermann Einstein asked his son's headmaster what profession his son should adopt, the answer was simply, "It doesn't matter; he'll never make a success of anything." (Ref. 2, p. 10)

After finishing his primary education with difficulty, Albert Einstein joined Luitpold Gymnasium, where he spent six years of training and education. That school was quite traditional and did not encourage Einstein's creative personality and exploration. Gradually, Einstein developed resentment for the school system. His biographer wrote, *"The Gymnasium was to leave a critical effect on Einstein in separate ways. The first was that its discipline created in him deep suspicion of authority in general and educational authority in particular. This feeling lasted all his life, without qualification. The teachers in the elementary school appeared to me like sergeants and in the*

Gymnasium the teachers were like lieutenants. He remembered more than forty years later, speaking to the seventy-second Convocation of the State University of New York; he noted that to him, 'the worst thing seems to be for school principally to work with methods of fear, force, and artificial authority. Such treatment destroys the healthy feelings, the integrity, and self-confidence of the pupils.'" (Ref. 2, p. 13)

But then luckily, in most traditional schools there are a few exceptions. There are teachers who encourage the spontaneity of children and nurture their creativity. They support students to think outside the box and explore their independent thinking and non-traditional lifestyle. Creative students are attracted to such teachers and relatives who support their unconventional passions. Einstein was also lucky to have one such teacher in his school. Ronald Clark wrote, *"At the Gymnasium, there appears to have been, as there is in such schools, one master who stood apart, the odd man out, going his nonconformist way. His name was Reuss. He tried to make his pupils think for themselves while most of his colleagues did little more, in Einstein's later opinion, than encourage an academic kadavergehorsamkeit - 'the obedience of the corpse' that was required among troops of the Imperial Prussian army."* (Ref. 2, p. 14)

Einstein was also lucky to have an uncle, Casar Koch who encouraged his independent thinking and nurtured his creative personality. Einstein looked forward to his visits and shared his creative and artistic thoughts with him. In his forties he affectionately wrote to his uncle, " You have always been my best-loved uncle...You have always been one of the few who have warmed my heart

whenever I thought of you, and when I was young your visit was always a great occasion." Clark talks about the sharing that took place between Einstein and his favourite uncle in these words, "But some confidence was sparked up between uncle and nephew and it was to Casar that Einstein was to send, as a boy of sixteen, an outline of the imaginative ideas later developed into the Special Theory of Relativity." (Ref. 2, p. 12)

It is my opinion that all schools and communities need more teachers like Reuss who encourage independent and nonconformist thinking in their students and more uncles like Casar who nurture the creative personalities of their nephews and nieces so that we have scientists and artists amongst us. We do not need those principals who discourage parents by stating that their children will 'never make a success of anything' and teachers who tell parents with great confidence that their child will 'never amount to anything', not knowing that these children and students might be the future Einsteins and Whitmans of the world and their comments might become part of their future biographies.

Creative Students, Traditional Colleges and Universities

When Creative Students are sent to colleges and universities, they are looking forward to intellectually stimulating environments where they can grow socially and creatively, but they feel disappointed when they find themselves surrounded by traditional books and professors. These students do not find their

courses interesting and stimulating and get easily bored. When these students try to be innovative, their professors and university authorities do not support them. Some of those students get so disillusioned that they leave, while others get into intense confrontations. There were many well-respected scientists, artists, mystics and reformers who were perceived as threats by their traditional colleges and universities. The dialogues and debates between those students, their families and academic institutions played a significant role in their choice of professions.

The scientist that comes to my mind in this respect is Charles Darwin. Darwin's biographers, Michael White and John Gribbin highlight how Darwin's relationship with educational institutions was troubled from the very beginning. Darwin did not like the Shrewsbury School to which his parents sent him as it was run by the disciplinarian Reverend Samuel Butler, "...It was strict and traditional at Shrewsbury and Charles hated it."

Charles detested regimented learning and had absolutely no interest in the Classics, which constituted the majority of the curriculum. He regularly cribbed off friends and did the absolute minimum to avoid a beating for laziness or poor test results. As Darwin himself put it: *"Nothing could have been worse for the development of my mind than Dr. Butler's school, as it was a strictly classical, nothing else being taught, except a little ancient geography and history. The school as a means of education to me was simply a blank."* (Ref. 3, p. 8)

While Charles was bored at Shrewsbury, his brother Eras, who was also had a creative personality was bored at Cambridge. They would write and talk

to each other to share their frustrations with traditional academic institutions and to find ways to cope with them. White and Gribbin wrote, "*Eras hated his work at Cambridge almost as much as his brother continued to detest the Shrewsbury curriculum. Eras found himself taught by dull lecturers and had to endure a seemingly endless succession of calcifying boring discourses. The brothers' correspondence was full of ... bitter references to their formal education.*" (Ref. 3, p. 11)

Such traditional books, teachers and educational environments have negative effects on the minds and personalities of creative students. They get disillusioned by their universities and professors and then start looking for their own ways to educate themselves about their passions and dreams. When Charles' father realized that his son was not benefiting from classes, he took him out of school. He was angry with his son, who he thought did not work hard or study and wasted his time at sports. "In a rare moment of anger, Dr. Robert told Charles that he 'cared for nothing but shooting, dogs and rat-catching' and that he would be a disgrace to himself and all his family." (Ref. 3, p. 13)

Charles was sent to medical school to become a doctor and follow his in father's footsteps but Charles did not like medical school as he hated dissection. Luckily, Charles discovered the Plinian Society that interested him because members of that society engaged in intellectually stimulating discussions, wrote articles about natural history and sciences and critiqued each other's papers. Darwin gradually developed interest in geology. That is why "during his two years in Edinburgh, Darwin learned

far more about geology than he did about medicine.” (Ref. 3, p.17)

Charles’ father was disappointed one more time. This time he took him out of medical school and sent him to a religious school to become a priest. Charles learnt about theology but in his heart he was not convinced about Christian teachings. During his studies in medical school he became close friends with Robert Grant who was a rebel and also a member of the Plinian Society. The more Charles got to know Grant the more he became aware of his ideas. Grant was a logical man with a scientific mind. He openly criticized Christianity and the Bible as he saw blatant “contradictions between the contents of the Bible and the new findings of science.” (Ref. 3, p.17)

His friendship with Robert Grant and discussions with free thinkers sowed the seeds of doubt about God, religion and the Bible, which later bore fruits in Darwin’s books, *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*. He discussed his disagreement with the traditional teachings of the Bible and Christianity.

It is obvious that Darwin’s family, school and university wanted him to follow the traditional path while he wanted to follow his heart. They wanted him to become a doctor or a priest while he wanted to become a scientist. The more his father and professors demanded obedient behaviour, the more he rebelled. Finally, the family and the university had to give in as they realized that his creativity could not be tamed. Little did his traditional parents know that they were dealing with a young man whose research and writings would change forever how human beings saw the relationship between man and God. Little did

his Christian teachers know that he would try to prove to the world that humans were created in the image of an ape rather than God. Remarkably, Darwin was able to provide evidence that human beings had evolved from lower animals. He described and proved human evolution through scientific evidence rather than "by a series of divine interventions." (Ref. 3, p. 17)

Darwin, like many other creative students, found the traditional environment of college and university quite restrictive and suffocating.

Helping Creative Teenagers Become Successful

Over the years I have met a number of creative teenagers who were suffering because they were in conflict with their families and schools. Some of them were anxious and depressed, while others were angry. Some left schools voluntarily while others were asked to leave. Most of them did not have well-paying, stable jobs so they were financially dependent on their parents. Some of these parents had been supportive for a while but gradually began losing their patience. In some families, one parent was sympathetic while the other was frustrated and that difference created tension in the family. Many parents believed that those teenagers were lazy and were using their creativity as an excuse to cover up their irresponsibility.

Many teenagers that I worked with had a strange schedule. They were up all night reading, writing, painting, drawing, listening to music, talking

to their creative friends or surfing the Internet and then sleeping all day long. I would give them late afternoon appointments as they frequently slept in and missed morning appointments, which created big fights in the family. These teenagers did not take care of their clothes, food or health. They believed they were carefree while their parents perceived them as careless, wasting their lives away. Their families called some of those teenagers 'bums', 'losers' and 'parasites', which they found rude, offensive and insulting.

It was interesting for me to note that these parents believed that their children had serious emotional and mental problems and were in need of 'psychiatric' or 'professional' help, while these teenagers felt strongly that they were 'not crazy' and did not need to see a 'shrink'.

Before I met these teenagers, some of them had seen a number of therapists but did not continue therapy after a couple of sessions. When I asked them the reason for discontinuing therapy, they shared with me that they felt judged by those therapists as they were labeled as 'delinquents' who had 'psychopathic', 'hysterical' or 'narcissistic' personalities. These teenagers found their therapists demanding and felt that they wanted them to follow the rules and regulations that those teenagers resisted and resented. Within a short time these creative teenagers recreated a tense relationship with their therapists similar to the one they had with their parents, teachers and other authority figures. In many cases, the tension escalated to the point that they stopped seeing the therapists and their parents could not convince them to change their minds.

I feel fortunate that most of these creative teenagers connected with me and I was able to help them work through their conflicts and be successful in their personal, family, educational and social lives. When I reflect upon all those teenagers that I worked with I realize that those creative teenagers did not want to follow any rules and regulations because they did not respect authority. They consider all forms of authority, what Einstein called 'false authority', as an authority that generates fear rather than respect. They feel intimidated rather than protected by their authority figures. That is why they react strongly against them. The teachers and parents perceiving their resentment, label them rebels and react in a punitive way.

It has been my observation that creative teenagers are comfortable with the nurturing parent but have great difficulty with the disciplinarian parent with whom they get into power struggles. I find it interesting that in most traditional families, mothers become the nurturing parent and fathers become the disciplinarian parent, while in some modern families, fathers become the nurturing parent and the mothers become the disciplinarian parent. In single parent families, the same parent has to play both roles. I met many mothers of creative children who had a wonderful relationship with their child as long as they were nurturing but the moment they became disciplinarian, the children became resistive and they got into a power struggle. The situation becomes more complicated in blended families where the nurturing and disciplinarian roles need to be worked out more carefully between parents and children.

The conflicts between the creative teenagers and the disciplinarian parent can easily create tension that can escalate into resentment and finally, there is an angry and violent exchange, after which the teenager either runs away from home, is kicked out or the police are called. In the latter situation, the teenager is often taken away from home to a hospital or a shelter until the Children's Aid Society finds them a suitable foster home and then the cycle of the power struggle starts all over again.

When I meet these teenagers, my main focus is to connect with their creative side in a nurturing way. Rather than focusing on their anxiety, depression, anger or discussing their diagnosis, I inquire about their hobbies and passions and dreams. I ask what they read, write, play, paint, draw or sculpt. I ask them to bring their poems, songs or paintings to show me. They are thrilled. Sometimes in their entire lives, I was the first one who showed such a keen interest in their creative products.

It is not uncommon for their parents to be pleasantly surprised to see their teenage sons and daughters looking forward to their therapy sessions. After I develop a special bond with them and earn their trust, I ask them a simple but profound question, "Would you like to live a healthy, happy and successful life?" They usually say, "Yes". It is at that stage I share with them that I have named my clinic *Creative Psychotherapy Clinic*, because I feel developing the creative side of our personality is intimately connected with our mental health. I share with them that I have come to the conclusion as a therapist and a writer that for artists to be successful they have to be free and for artistic freedom they need financial and

emotional independence. Artists, like others, need money to pay the bills. They need money to survive and buy their art supplies and have fun with their friends. During my honest and open discussions, I ask them to draw a map of their lives highlighting their past, present and future. I ask them to plan how they can achieve economic and emotional independence.

Once those creative teenagers are connected with me and are motivated to change, I encourage them to get a job or go back to school and develop a circle of friends, that I call the *Family of the Heart*, who are supportive and appreciative of their creative life.

After working with creative teenagers in one to one sessions and developing a positive trusting relationship, I suggest a few family therapy sessions. These sessions aid in discussing the conflicts so that we are collectively able to find ways to resolve them and create a harmonious family life.

It has been my observation that creative teenagers do things that they *like to do, want to do and love to do*. They usually come in conflict with those parents who have traditional personalities that are duty bound and are guided by what people *should do, have to do and must do*. If these parents tend to be more idealistic or perfectionistic and have high expectations for themselves and others, they are usually disappointed in their children, especially creative teenagers. When I think of all the perfectionistic parents that I worked with in my clinical practice and the conflicts they had with their creative teenagers, I can divide their complaints into four issues:

1. Cleanliness.

There are many creative teenagers who have no

sense of cleanliness. Their rooms remain uncleaned and work places disorganized. Their uncleanliness and disorganization creates tension for their families and they feel frustrated.

2. Time.

Creative teenagers usually do not pay attention to time. They are generally late, even forgetful and their dear ones spend hours and hours waiting for them. Many parents wish their children had better time management.

3. Money.

Most creative teenagers I have met did not have a sense of money. They were more concerned about spending than earning money. That is why their parents consider them irresponsible and impulsive. But most creative teenagers are oblivious to their financial status. They are very poor in budgeting their money.

4. Morality.

Creative teenagers generally do not agree with the moral standards of their families and communities. They follow their hearts and do not feel obliged to follow the religious and social traditions. That is why it is not uncommon for them to come in conflict with traditional and conservative organizations as they challenge authority.

These four issues might be a challenge between any parent with their teenage children but the conflicts become unbearable between creative teenagers and idealistic and perfectionistic parents who have obsessive compulsive personalities. Family therapy sessions help these families resolve their conflicts and make weekly schedules highlighting

mutually acceptable and respectable expectations. I suggest weekly family meetings at home and help them improve their communication and sort out their problems in a respectful way.

I find it interesting that their friends, cousins and neighbors adore the same creative teenagers that are resented by their parents. People find them fascinating because of their creative talent and artistic temperament. I heard many parents of creative teenagers say to their friends and relatives, "He is lovable but hard to live with," or "She is fascinating from a distance but difficult to work with."

Creative teenagers feel far more settled when they are able to negotiate their special needs with their families of origin.

After resolving family conflicts, I focus on their dating patterns and romantic lives. I share with them that creative people need to be with special people who can accept their need to have private time to do their creative work which does not result in their partners feeling rejected or abandoned. It is not uncommon for me to invite their partners to have an open and honest discussion about their mutual expectations. The issues become more complicated if these creative teenagers are pregnant or have children. We have discussions about balancing their creative and family lives. For teenagers or young adults who are contemplating marriage and family life, I ask them to wait until they are mature enough to take responsibility for family life. I share with them that having a family is one of the most important choices for creative people. I have met many artists who regretted taking that step. They adore their children but sometimes wish they never had them as

they are so involved in their creative work, they do not have time to fulfill their parental responsibilities. The choice of having children can be difficult for the average people but can become far more difficult for creative people. I ask teenagers to take that decision very seriously and not commit to the responsibilities of adult life until they are ready for them.

Over the years, the creative teenagers and young adults that I worked with started feeling better within a few months. As they improved, their anxiety, depression and anger subsided, and they developed a healthier relationship with authority figures. As the suffering decreased, they were able to discover a new balance between their personal and family, creative and social, artistic and romantic lives.

Once those teenagers accepted their creative personalities, they could deal with the dilemmas associated with their personality and lifestyle. They were better able to develop a realistic plan to fulfill their dreams. As well, once the families accepted their creative teenagers they were able to have better communication with them, resolve conflicts and establish realistic expectations.

One of the important things for creative people is to become aware of their options and then make wise choices. It is not uncommon for creative people to find their creative lives in conflict with their educational, professional and family lives. Creative people need to not only learn to nurture their creativity but also come to terms with other aspects of their lives. Creativity, like love and spirituality, asks for sacrifices. Some artists are more ready to offer those sacrifices than others.

In my practice, it is not uncommon for me to share some aspects of my creative journey with them. Most teenagers connect very well with my personal stories. I encourage them to read the biographies of creative people in the manuscript of another book we are working on entitled , *From Breakdowns to Breakthroughs* in which I have reviewed the life stories of Virginia Woolf, Vincent Van Gough, Diane Arbus, Frida Kahlo, Ezra Pound, Anais Nin and many others. Those articles help my patients have realistic expectations of life.

After working with many creative teenagers and adults in my clinical practice, my final comment is that working with creative people can be more frustrating but also more rewarding than working with traditional people. I look forward to working with them and their families as I learn as much from them as they learn from me.

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