



Photo by David Mallgrave

There IS life in the funky old school

By RICK WORTHINGTON
Of the Emerald

Six miles outside of Santa Clara on River Road, located in a pastoral environment, is an old single structure school building which for the past 10 years has served as a home for the Arrowhead School. Arrowhead is a private school for children, aged 3 through 14, and some of its basic philosophies are indicated in a pamphlet entitled "Arrowhead: An Alternative Education."

"Major emphasis is on individual progress. Students progress at their own rate and there are no grades given."

"The humanistic student-teacher relationship contributes greatly to the naturalness and warmth of the atmosphere."

"Students have an appreciation of themselves and others — they are encouraged to think individually, to accept freedom and its responsibilities, to participate in their environment...and to find joy in life and learning."

Of course, nice sounding phrases often have a way of dissolving in the face of harsh realities, particularly when the subject is alternative education. But after visiting Arrowhead School, one comes to feel that the nice sounding phrases accurately reflect a joyous reality and a viable alternative education, rather than a rhapsodic speculation about a better world.

The driving force behind it all is Mary Buckner, the principal and founder of the school. If a single word could be used to describe her, it would have to be enthusiasm. Every word she says, and every action she makes, radiates with warmth and commitment.

She said, for example, "I really

love my work. Why, I was here working until 10 p.m. last night, and I could hardly wait to get back this morning for another day."

Not that Mary Buckner is the only person at Arrowhead who is enthusiastic. The 50 children who are students there arrive first thing in the morning, ready to go, laughing, swinging on swings, or doing anything else imaginable. And when it is time for classes to begin, they are ready to begin work.

The other five teachers who work at Arrowhead are just as ready to plunge into another day as Buckner and the students are. In addition, numerous parents blend into the general activity, talking with Buckner or the other teachers, talking with one another, talking to the children. Through it all, the atmosphere is relaxed, congenial, yet serious.

Certainly one of the most important assets of Arrowhead is the old building in which it is located. It is, to use the perfect word, funky.

"This site actually has some history as a place for education," Buckner said. "There have been three school buildings here in the last 100 years. I think one of them burned down and the other just wore out, but this one has been here for at least 30 or 40 years."

More important, however, is the basic attitude toward education that pervades Arrowhead. Buckner talks about all the things that progressive people always talk about when the topic of alternative education comes up — dignity for the child, less structure and old-fashioned discipline, a cooperative environment rather than competition and rewards for high achievement — but the impressive thing is that you can see it all before your own eyes at Arrowhead.

As an example, Buckner showed an elaborate chart-diagram on human physiology which her students made. "We had kids from 3 to 14 years old working on this project together, each at his own level of intellectual development," she said.

From the end product, it seems apparent that the older students were able to achieve a standard of excellence comparable to what might be expected from children their age, at the same time that they worked with the younger students on the project.

In the middle of a serious

conversation about the unique problems of ghetto schools a young girl got out of a car and came running up the steps to the school house.

"Hi, Mary," she blurted out. "Hi, Andrea with your cute red shoes," Mary responded, giving the girl a hug as she ran into the building. Then just as fast, we were back into the conversation about the ghetto schools.

The children who attend Arrowhead are for the most part from families of University related people. Mary has no qualms about recognizing that the particular program offered at Arrowhead is mainly available to and possible with a relatively privileged class of children. Not only do financial considerations constrain many families from sending their children to schools like Arrowhead, but the need for parental involvement and commitment to their children's education required by the Arrowhead concept is generally found only among middle-class, progressive people.

What is going on at Arrowhead is progressive, but not utopian. As could be expected, Buckner often finds it necessary to mete out discipline in order to maintain order and an environment generally conducive to learning. But when she does so, her students don't obey out of fear, but out of a genuine respect. According to her, when the antics of a single student are encroaching upon the orderliness of a classroom discussion, other students will take it upon themselves to keep things in line.

Not surprisingly, Mary Buckner is equipped with hard data for doubters. "What can I say when one of our students in the first grade is performing at the level of a fifth grader on the state's standardized tests? Almost all of our students do quite well on standardized tests. I think this educational program is working."

Ability to score well on standardized tests, of course, is only one aspect of the overall program, and Buckner lets you know that when she emphasizes "the state's standards" rather than her own. All of which stresses that Arrowhead represents a total educational and developmental program, a by-product of which is unusually high achievement by the students on "objective" tests.

One of Arrowhead's current projects is a Carnival International, which is being presented by the parents, students and teachers, to be held Saturday from 2 to 7 p.m. There will be food from many countries — lumpias, burritos, wontons, curry puffs, dolmas, koesisters, hot dogs and lemonade. Also for sale will be used books, children's clothing, baked goods and small crafts such as macrame, leather, tied-dye, handmade jewelry and hanging plants.

There will be pony rides and a place where children can make their own crafts.

Free entertainment will include outdoor performances of Polynesian and Middle Eastern ethnic dancers. Highlights of the afternoon will be a performance by the New Mime Circus.

The school is located on the right hand side of the road as you drive toward Junction City, six miles past Santa Clara. Anyone interested in further information on the carnival should call the school at 998-3112.

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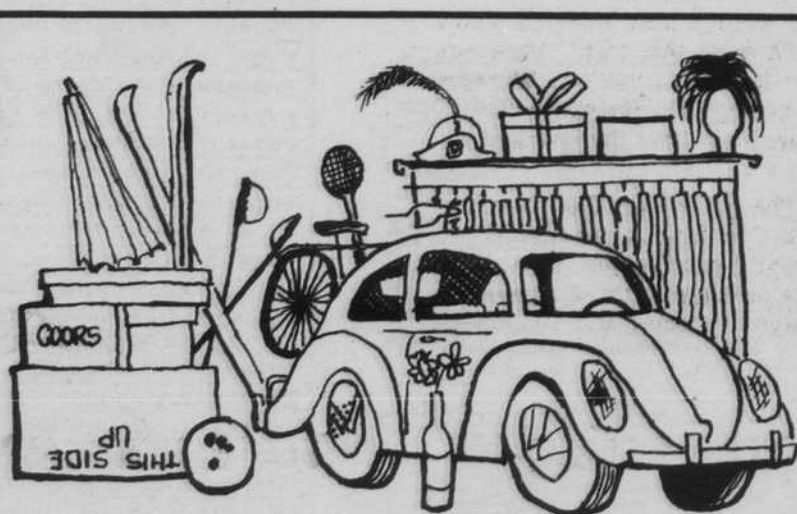
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