

Hold on Tight to Your Gift Packages!

HELPING OUR CHILDREN FIND THEIR WAY
THROUGH SCHOOL

“All children are gifted — they just unwrap their packages at different times.” As a teacher for more than 20 years, I firmly believe in this old adage, and I have seen the truth of it countless times.

Now I also get to see it at home with my own two children, ages 11 and 16. They are so different, but both brilliant and kind. They are interested in and passionate about different things. They have been given different “packages,” and it has been my privilege to watch them open them over the past 15 years.

As a parent informed by my work as an educator, I have worked hard to be sure that these two have plenty of time and room to open their gift packages. I have tried to find schools and other spaces where they can learn and grow at their own pace: preschools with a play focus rather than an academic focus; schools with plenty of hands-on learning and few worksheets. This has been a challenge, and it has become more and more difficult as they get older.

My oldest was amazingly curious as a child. She noticed everything, questioned everything and made surprising connections between books, experiences and conversations she’d had with me, her teachers and her peers. We lived in New York City, and she was exposed to different kinds of people as well as concepts of racism, sexism and classism on a daily basis.

We lived close to the Bronx Zoo and went there frequently. It’s run by the Wildlife Conservation Society and still has a wonderful immersive exhibit about endangered tigers. My first grade child wrote and drew copious notes in her “zoo notebook” (of course she had a zoo notebook!) and at home she wrote a persuasive essay imploring everyone to help the tigers. “Poachers are hurting and killing our tigers,” she wrote. And, “Stop watching TV and save the world!” She read it out loud, and we put it online so it could reach a wider audience. What a joy to behold!

I worked hard to protect her from a system that I knew would crush that passion for learning. I insisted that memorizing multiplication tables is not the most important thing in the world and that report cards don’t really tell us much about her as a developing human. We opted out of standardized tests — both to avoid excess stress and also as a protest.

So imagine my horror when this child, now a 10th-grader, insisted upon taking the PSAT earlier this year. I tried to talk her out of it. “It helps you prepare for the SAT,” she said. “You don’t need to take that either,” I answered. “I do if I want to get into a good college,” she replied. “But, you could go to one of the more than 1,000 colleges that don’t require SAT scores,” I helpfully suggested. Her response: “I don’t want to go to one of your hippie colleges!”

I fear that the competition focus and standardization of public schools has changed this girl. She has had some amazing and lovely teachers; she has been lucky to have gone on field trips to the wetlands and to University of Oregon museums, and to have had opportunities to be creative in her writing and to participate in engaging extracurricular projects. But overarching all of that is this pressure to perform and conform.

What if my own sweet baby drops her gift packages while focusing on getting all A’s and a 1,600? ■

Deanna Chappell Belcher is a parent of two daughters, a former public school teacher, a UO doctoral student and was a candidate for Eugene 4J School Board, Position 7. CAPE, the Community Alliance for Public Education, works “to defend public education from the damaging practices of ‘reformers’ and corporate interests.” CAPE is a member of the Oregon Public Education Network (OPEN). Find us at oregoncape.org.

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The Shedd Institute

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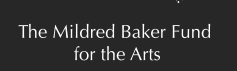
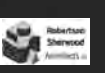
Shedd Theatricals 2019

DAMN
YANKEES



July 12-21

The Shedd Institute



Oregon Festival of American Music 2019

*Might As
Well Be Swing*

Jul 24-Aug 3
Eugene, OR

Reflections on the
Age of Swing, 1928-46



OFAM 2019 Evening Concerts (July 24 - August 3)

- Jul 24 In The Age of Swing - Opening Gala Concert
 - Jul 25 It Don't Mean A Thing - Swinging with Duke
 - Jul 26 Drum Boogie - The Swing Drummers, 1938-47
 - Jul 27 Moonlight Serenade - Swing and the War Years
 - Jul 28 Swing's The Thing - The 2019 Festival Jazz Party
 - Jul 30 Satchmo Swings
 - Jul 31 Slipped Disc - Small Group Swing
 - Aug 1 Chasing Shadows - The Dorsey Brothers
 - Aug 2 One O'Clock Jump - Great Pianists of Swing
 - Aug 3 Benny! - From the Palomar Ballroom to Carnegie Hall
- plus 6 matinees, 8 films, 8 talks, 2 community sing-alongs