

Nurturing the Beings of the Schools

by Peter Rennick

An important celebration of Waldorf education in America took place October 3, 2015, with the 25th anniversary meeting of the seven schools who make up the Arizona Council for Waldorf Education. Joan Treadaway, President of the Council since its inception, welcomed more than forty people in attendance and opened the meeting with a remembrance of all the founding and pioneering individuals, speaking their names into the circle, and recalling those first efforts to bring Waldorf to Arizona. Often those early meetings saw only a few individuals attending study groups, with only vague ideas about how to get a school established. From the outset the Council offered itself as a central place where all of the burgeoning initiatives, spread out over the several environments within Arizona, would be able to meet together, share experiences and support one another.

Each of the seven schools shared their biography, tracing the developmental challenges through the seven year cycles of their journey. It was like listening to the life stories of unique individual souls, the conditions of their birth, early years garnering interest and enthusiasm, meeting conflicts and disappointments appropriate to each stage of growth, through the identity issues of adolescence and on into the early years of adulthood. In those teenage years each school had to face the question of how to maintain its integrity and faithfulness to the Waldorf pedagogy Rudolf Steiner created, when the option of becoming a charter school or remaining a private and state-independent endeavor became possible. This question created a crisis in some schools, as it did across the Waldorf landscape, where the charter option has been made available. In some of the Arizona schools, long-standing faculty, parents, and board members decided to leave rather than enter into a contract with the state that they felt would compromise important aspects of the Waldorf approach, particularly in the early childhood and elementary years. How this was reflected in the concerns

expressed by AWSNA and its relationship to the schools and to the Alliance for Public Waldorf education formed the background, and sometimes the intensive foreground, for each school's decision to find its own path and evolving self.

But all through these years of growth, the Council continued to meet three or four times a year, as a forum

for any and all issues relevant to Waldorf education in Arizona and the world, and as a spiritual support and professional model for collaborative work, with schools visiting back and forth, sharing training opportunities and putting members in touch with the larger community of Waldorf education of which they are a part. A deep respect for each initiative has grown up among the family of members, despite the fact that some have remained private and others have

risked going charter. In Tucson, for example, there is one of each, with no loss of willingness to collaborate together toward the greater good of all.

I was reminded of what Rudolf Steiner had to say about the collaboration that would need to exist between the Platonists and the Aristotelians returning at the end of the century, the ten years either side of which saw the founding of these seven Arizona initiatives. Surely among the several hundred people intimately involved in lighting the flames and maintaining the home fires of these young schools, some of those returning spirits are to be found. Blessings on ACWE and our dear schools, may they continue in good health together for years and years to come!

