

Who is Doing What

VWS Alumni Corner

Interview with Julia Wilby

Class of 1988



VWS: What did you do for work & education post Vancouver Waldorf School?

JW: I graduated from Vancouver Waldorf School in the Class of 1988. There 16 of us, 8 of whom had been there since Grade 1 (and some even preschool). I started out in Capilano College (as it was called then) with the intention of going to Parson's in New York to study Fashion Design. My English professor identified me as a Waldorf graduate by the 3rd class. My Philosophy and Art History professors were amazing and by November, I was doing a degree in Philosophy with a minor in Art History. I transferred to UBC at third year and graduated with a philosophy degree in 1992. I was a serious student at UBC and spent lunches at lectures in Classical Studies and Art History etc. After graduating, I went to Europe for a few months. It was a wonderful experience. I was voracious for Art History and did all kinds of art historical and architectural research. I discovered the Warburg and Courthauld Institutes in London. While I was never accepted for my Masters there (you need proficiency in Latin as well as several other languages), it motivated me to go back to UBC to continue studying Art History. I did go back and did my post bachelor Diploma in Art History. I also had the Europe bug by this time. As did my then fiancé who was from New Zealand and posted in Amsterdam. We spent a year based in Amsterdam working for Contiki. Amsterdam has hundreds of art museums and you can get an annual pass. We travelled a lot on days off and did a four month trip, stopping where we felt like it, before returning to Vancouver to live. I am now married to my high school sweetheart from Germany, Ralf. We have three children, "Meine, deine, unserer". Meta, Ralf's daughter, 16, is still in Germany, Hamilton, 7, my son, is in Grade School at VWS, and Sofia, 3, I continue to travel whenever possible and I went back to school to get some additional vocational training I became a teacher.

VWS: What kind of work/study are you involved in now?

JW: I I swore I would never become a teacher. My mom, Elizabeth Wilby, taught in the Waldorf school for 30 years, and it looked like way too much work. But, here I am, 15 years in, and I love it. I am a teacher at Burnaby North Secondary where I teach Art, Tech Ed, and Special Ed. It's a large school of 2300 students, which has its challenges, but the benefit is that you can run specialty courses and programs. As a Waldorf graduate, the "specialty" classes are where I keep ending up. I never pursued Special Education; I just kept landing there. I had some interesting experiences as a result. I taught art and cooking in the youth detention center – yes, there was school inside the jail facility. The students were very nice to me as cooking class was the only decent food they got. Then back to Burnaby North, I ran a program for gray area students who could not function without a little assistance in the regular stream of students, but were not severely special needs.

It was really fun. It was kind of like being a mama bear. I got to haul them out of Starbucks if they were skipping, and hug them when they graduated. I have been at the school in Burnaby long enough now to have carved out a niche for myself. Hence, I get to teach all the sculpture in the Visual and Performing Arts department, as well as a Creative Wood Metal Art class in Tech Ed. It is more like an art class where you get to use real tools. We cast jewelry, weld steel sculptures, create wood carvings...a lot like a Waldorf High School crafts block. I also run the stage crew for our school productions. We are blessed with an excellent stage complete with a fly system so each year I run a student crew to create the sets. When students ask me where I learned to do this stuff, I tell them I painted my first set in the seventh grade for Joan of Arc.

VWS: What do you think are your greatest successes in life?

JW: I The variety of experiences. Travel, study, career, and the crowning glory, my children and family. I am one of those lucky people who would choose exactly the family I have. They are all over the world, but we all meet up frequently and have a fabulous time.

VWS: How did Waldorf education affect your life & career choice?

JW: In the Waldorf school, everyone gets to do everything all the way. To manage these skills, you are taught balance and respect. In many walks of life, I am often called upon as the person who can do anything. While it is flattering, it can be big shoes to fill. It's been vocationally valuable too. I had jobs where I painted murals on walls, worked in the film industry, was a ski instructor, waitressed, was the handy person in a hotel, was a concierge for the Waterfront Center hotel, cooked for groups in a youth hostel, cleaned rooms, painted the buildings, arranged flowers, worked in an Italian restaurant attached to an English pub, washed dogs, did photo shoots of events, etc. All hires were based on experience or training I obtained at the Waldorf school. Oh yes, I also did cocktail service to German tourists for Dutch folk lore shows during tulip season. I wore the whole Dutch costume including wooden shoes. They hired me because, thanks to VWS, I had German.

VWS: What are your fondest memories of VWS?

JW: My teachers, class plays, and class trips of course! You don't such a range of experiences afterwards unless you pursue them. I saw my first opera in Gr. 9 with the school. I also liked playing my cello in an orchestra and the Christmas fair. I like that I can still walk in to the school and feel at home. I like that all the teachers still know who I am when I run into them at the Christmas Fair, the coffee shop, or at the opera.

Interview by Ronaye Ireland, for Development, March 2013