

# *Rising Tide School*

## *I Can Think for Myself*

This essay is by Jamie Rebecca Tyrell, a student at The Circle School, our sister school in Pennsylvania.

I can think for myself. It is my most cherished skill. I have not always had this ability. It is a skill, like any other, which I have had to discover and hone. My thinking used to be centered on how I was perceived and ranked by others. Before I could learn to think for myself I needed to learn to thrive on my uniqueness.

I started my education with an active, questioning mind. Upon entering school I excelled, got excellent grades, and was always the teacher's pet. I unconsciously followed the expectations of my teachers and society. I did not know to pursue my own desires. As I spent more time in school my intellectual frustration grew, and I started to dislike being there. When I was ten, I came to realize that constantly feeling too "ill" to go to school was an intellectual malady, not a medical one. I was not happy.

Then I discovered The Circle School and its program, where each person is expected to be responsible for making all the choices relevant to her life. When I enrolled I thought I wanted to pursue my previous studies at an accelerated pace, that this would make me happy.

My drive for the approval of authority led me to volunteer for too many responsibilities. Yet I learned that the people I looked to for approval were not exercising authority over me; I was accountable only to myself. If I could not find a personal reason to complete the commitments I had made, there would not be anyone telling me to do it anyway. I was trusted to know what was best for me. I had over-committed myself to jobs I did not want to be doing—because of my desire for outside praise, not an inner drive. I was still not happy.

In beginning my search for personal motivation, I chose to spend my time without responsibilities and pursue "fun" activities I had never allowed myself to focus on. I sang and danced, drew pictures, built forts, and obsessed over computers. I spent time uncovering aspects of my personality that had been hidden in my attempts to fit in and please. I rediscovered my active, questioning mind, and explored my thoughts on life, the environment, love, responsibility, body hair, and literature. I found out about other people's thinking through discussions, interactions, and arguments. As my beliefs became clearer to me, my ability to communicate them strengthened. The strongest belief I have is that all people have the ability to think for themselves, and should have the opportunity to make the definitive decisions about their lives. I have come to realize how much I love my school, and the freedom it allows me. I have a new-found desire to take on responsibilities, because I want the school to remain the haven where I learned to express and explore all the facets of myself that I might otherwise have ignored. The choices I make now closely resemble those I made before. Once again I spend time in meetings and "being responsible." However, now I am not stressed out. I know how to balance my time and not over-commit myself. I choose to undertake responsibilities because I want to support them, not because of someone else's expectations. I learned to say no.

*Rising Tide School welcomes racial, cultural and religious diversity, and families of every composition.*

My meeting schedule is interspersed with reading, play practices, fundraisers, book discussions, political discussions, social discussions, card games, and planned “free time.” I find personal motivation for every task I undertake.

As I reflect on who I am now, I am often curious why. I do not know if the shape of my personality was defined by my experiences, or if my personality was set before I could think for myself, but I have learned the value of the freedom I have been given. I am no longer the smart wallflower sitting passively in the corner. Instead, I am in the center of the room defending my opinions and extolling the virtues of freedom of thought. I love the self-aware, thinking, responsible self I am. I am happy.

*Jamie Rebecca Tyrell*