

NSRF's Living History: An Interview with Heidi Vosekas

Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

NSRF's Living History is a series of interviews with members about our past, our present and our hopes for the future. In this issue we hear from Heidi Vosekas, NSRF National Center Coordinator, as she shares her story with Peggy Silva of New Hampshire for Connections.

Two-year old Cecilia Campbell Vosekas raced across the room to blow out the candles on NSRF's 10th Anniversary cake, completely convinced that the party was being held in her honor. Cecilia has been an important visitor to the Winter Meetings, in the company of her mom, Heidi, our National Center Coordinator. We wanted to bring Heidi out from behind the desk at Winter Meeting to get to know her work on behalf of NSRF National.

Please talk about your history with NSRF.

Since travel has always been my primary goal, I never thought that I would be working in my hometown, back in the Harmony School from which I had graduated. I had returned home after graduating from Earlham College, a Quaker school in Richmond, Indiana, and was washing dishes in a restaurant when I learned of a job at the Harmony Education Center in 1999. Shortly after I arrived, my temporary job evolved into a chance to create a national center for NSRF. I vividly remember the excitement brewing as we dreamed about the future of NSRF. Two of us staffed the office in 2000; we grew to six people, and now there are four of us who support NSRF's work across the country.

So few of us have had the opportunity to visit Harmony School. Please describe your school experience as a student there.

There were twelve students in my graduating class, many of whom had attended Harmony for their entire school experience. The courses that made the most lasting impressions on me included a ninth grade course in Greek and Latin roots, and a health class in my senior year. We were required to teach our peers the information we had learned during the first semester of that health course. I still remember dressing like queens with a friend and handing out

condoms on a street corner in Bloomington!

During my junior year in high school, my mom planned a kind of Swiss Family Robinson experience for my sister and me. I took study courses from Harmony while camping in Jamaica for seven months. This experience changed the course of all of our lives.

I built on this experience as a senior, designing an independent study as my semester-long senior project. I studied German, then lived in Switzerland and Austria for several months, implementing a series of community service projects there. Since

my high school career had afforded me so much international travel, I decided to spend a college semester in El Paso, Texas, studying border issues. Harmony School trained me to be a self-directed learner and to cast a wide net in seeking learning experiences in diverse places.

The connection between Harmony School and NSRF makes sense to me. Harmony is backed by 30 years of community building and has a strong dedication to kids and families.

What is the work that is most satisfying to you?

The organization comes to life when we begin to plan the Winter Meeting. It is the time when all the work we do coalesces into direct support of our membership. We have conversations with those planning the event for thousands of committed CFG coaches. We see the support we offer people who are directly impacting the lives of students. That is both satisfying and rewarding. Reading the evaluations makes it all worth it.

Our staff has been together for five years, so we know how to work together effectively. What is difficult for us is that as the work deepens and expands, we are experiencing growing pains. The organization has so many fluid definitions of its work in various places, yet as we grow it would benefit us to establish a common language the

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Cecilia Campbell Vosekas and Heidi Vosekas

Additional Resources:

Parmar, P. & Bain, B. (forthcoming, December 2006) "Spoken word and Hip Hop: The power of urban art and culture," (three-part series).

In J.L. Kincheloe & K. Hayes(Eds). City Kids: Understanding, Appreciating, and Teaching Them. New York: Peter Lang Publishing,

Pough, Gwendolyn, Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere, 2004, Northeastern University Press.

Ptah, Heru, A Hip Hop Story, 2002, Pocket Books, NY.

Camilla Greene can be reached at camillagreene@att.net



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strands within NSRF. For example, there is no one definition of a Center of Activity, so it is hard to design strategies to support the various applications of the work for vastly different centers.

The creative tension we feel as a very small staff is to support the ever-expanding work with our limited resources. We are proud of our work, and delighted when people seek us out to thank us for our support.

When not working for NSRF, what makes up your life?

My husband, my daughter Cecilia, stepdaughter Emilie, and I spend time each winter on our working farm in Jamaica. We have chickens and goats. We grow pineapples, mangoes, ginger, potatoes, and cabbage. This farm has been in my husband's family for many generations. My life is rich in love and family. ■

*Heidi Vosekas can be reached at hvosekas@nsrfharmony.org
Peggy Silva can be reached at psilva@sprise.com*

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Donna Reid can be contacted at cfgcoach@robreid.com

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

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The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

- School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
- Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
- The key to this effort is the development of a "learning community" based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
- To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.