Family Spotlight: Nurturing Capable Children

The Balogs! Doug and I (Jennifer) met in 1999 while working for the same company outside of Boston. (Fishing off the company pier, he called it!) When we welcomed Jane into our lives in 2005, we started to think that Boston might not be the ideal place to raise a family. Exciting, interesting, beautiful, historically significant - we loved it. I had spent half my life outside the U.S., and Boston felt so familiar to me. But looking at sweet wide-awake Jane, it didn’t seem to fit with our new role as a young family.

I’d always enjoyed coming to Pittsburgh to visit Doug’s friends and family, and it hit me on one of them that I should look around a little harder and pay attention a bit more. On our way back to the airport, I asked Doug if he’d like to move back home. Jane was five months old when we moved into our house in Point Breeze. Happy baby Michael was born 9 months after that, and cuddly baby Mae another two years after that. And over the years, Pittsburgh has far exceeded my expectations.

We’re now in our sixth and last (!) year at the Children’s School. I don’t remember how we first heard about it; I just remember wondering, “Is it really time to send Jane to school?” (Which now seems funny since as my mother says, “she just needs you to drive her places!”) We visited many schools that seemed warm, inviting, nurturing - what you’d want for preschool. But the Children’s School also believed that children are so very, very capable. Teachers can teach real, complex ideas as long as they are brought to the kids’ level.

Each of our children learned how to take surveys, graph, sew, cook, hammer and drill. They experimented with technology, learned that their input was valuable (especially through lab research), and met university students who showed them so many additional ways to move through an adult world. Michael learned as a 4 year-old that outer space is a vacuum (one of many “oh yeah, I think I remember that from school” moments for Mommy) and, therefore has no sound, with a simple jingle bell in a jar experiment. He learned about Antarctica and that polar bears and penguins don’t live at the same pole (really?). Jane learned and still talks about the human body and the systems that make it work. She taught us through retelling Native American stories that she understood people’s emotions more than we knew. Mae learned about the preciousness of water, its cycle and its different states. And by enacting the Native American “three sisters” farming practice, she will always know that beans were planted to grow up cornstalks, while squash covered the ground in between, so its broad leaves could keep the ground moist. They also made many friends and had fun.

Jane and Michael love coming back to visit and seeing what Mae is up to. And I know they’ll still want to come back even after Mae has joined them at the Environmental Charter School (ECS). I’m not really sure what I’m going to do the first time my car turns onto Margaret Morrison Street and I realize I’m not supposed to be there. Maybe I’ll stop in and learn something new!

Editor’s Note: You’d be welcome any time, Jennifer!