LIVE OUR EXPERIENCE

“Just be kind. That’s all I’m really sayin’.”

-John McGee

OUR JOURNEY TO SASKATOON...

I am still in awe by the amazing experience I had at the Gentle Teaching International Conference 2013 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan from September 17 to September 19. I am extremely grateful to have represented Arcane Horizon Inc. with Stephanie Erb, Linsay Skipp, Erika Seidler, Amy Tang and Cheryl McPherson. Thank you to Saskatchewan Alternative Initiatives for hosting this unforgettable event. It is my pleasure to share our journey with you.

Marielle Dacquel
Day Program Coordinator
We were greeted by fellow Gentle Teachers who travelled from all parts of the world: Greece, U.S.A., Iceland, Netherlands, Denmark, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Indonesia, U.K., and of course, Canada.

We arrived at the Sheraton Cavalier Hotel just in time for breakfast. We sat in a banquet room full of friendly people from different parts of the world who attended the conference for the same purpose – to share our knowledge and gain more insight into the philosophy we all have in common: Gentle Teaching.

Tim Jones, the Executive Director of Saskatchewan Alternative Initiatives, welcomed us and introduced the first speaker: Maurits Eijgendaal, the President of Gentle Teaching International from Skanderborg, Denmark.

Maurits reviewed the fundamentals of Gentle Teaching and ended his session with the following quote from a Danish philosopher:

“The loving person assumes that love is in the other person’s heart, and because of this assumption, he builds love in the other person, from the ground, inasmuch he trusts love to be there.”

-Soren Kierkegaard
Gentle Teaching was developed by John McGee who focused on the psychology of human interdependence. Under the Gentle Teaching philosophy, we, as caregivers, aim to teach those we serve to feel **safe, loved, loving and engaged** with us. These feelings are referred to as the four pillars of Gentle Teaching. *How do we teach these pillars to others?* We use our tools: **our eyes, hands, words and presence.**

### Pillars

**What does each pillar mean?**

**SAFE**
- Absence of fear
- Feeling comfortable and at peace
- Feeling relaxed without worries
- Developing a sense of self-worth

**LOVED**
- People want the best for you
- People will never hurt you
- Doing things to make you happy
- Life is good and hopeful

**LOVING**
- Wanting others to feel safe
- Doing good things for others
- Bringing joy and happiness
- Showing love

**ENGAGED**
- Preferring to be with others
- The opposite of loneliness
- Doing things together
- Sharing activities with loved ones

### Tools

**How can we use our tools?**

**EYES**
- Use your eyes to convey warmth
- Use your eyes in a nurturing way
- Look into the hearts of others
- Bring healing with a loving glance

**HANDS**
- Use your hands to keep others safe
- Use your hands softly and lightly
- Send messages of love
- Lend a helping hand to uplift others

**WORDS**
- Use your words to comfort
- Use your words to inspire others
- Encourage
- Speak genuinely

**PRESENCE**
- Use your presence to show acceptance
- Use your presence to bring peace
- Sign of unconditional love
- Allows others to feel safe and loved
THE ORGANIZATION OF OUR DAY

OUR SCHEDULE

1. Breakfast in the “Sheraton Centre” banquet hall.
2. A choice between three sessions that were described in the workshop guidebook that was provided on our first day.
3. Coffee break with snacks and an opportunity to network.
4. A choice between three sessions.
5. A delicious lunch buffet was served!
6. A choice between three sessions.
7. Coffee break with snacks and an opportunity to network.
8. A choice between three sessions.
9. “Coffee Talk” to discuss any questions of the day.
10. Evening entertainment activities

We each received a bag to welcome us to the conference. It contained a workshop guidebook with the details of the sessions, a pen, a notepad, postcards, and treats!

Some speakers offered the participants small gifts as a way to show their appreciation for attending their session.
We had the opportunity to attend 9 out of 27 sessions of our choice. The following is a glimpse of what we learned and experienced...

NONVIOLENT RESPONSE

Pouwel Van de Siepkamp (in photo) explained that people tend to be trapped in what they learn from past experiences when they assess a situation that may involve violence. There are expectations that may take place based on these experiences; however, we must be “in the moment.” Pouwel stated that awareness involves the following: 75% connecting with the feelings of the individual in the moment; 20% connecting with your own feelings; and 5% being aware of what the individual might do. What may have been factors to the cause of an incident a year ago, may not be a factor the following year. Correlations may exist in the “patterns of behaviors,” but we must take into consideration the feelings that the individuals are experiencing in that moment. As the workshop guidebook states, this session provided us with insight on how “to become unconditionally safe and loving to others.”

MUSIC THERAPY

Anne Koch-Mikkelsen and Niels Jorgen Bonnerup (in photo) hosted a session about music therapy. They taught us that music therapy is used within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive and social needs of an individual. Individuals use music as a method of expression. Music can change moods and emotional states. It can help develop coping and relaxing skills, and improve concentration and attention spans. Anne and Niels introduced us to Jacob. We watched a video of Jacob repeating a pattern on a large table drum, and playing the piano with a caregiver. It was clear in Jacob’s facial expressions that Gentle Teaching was applied through music.
Rhonda Miller is a loving mother who explained the importance of applying the Gentle Teaching pillars and tools to everyone around us, especially to our children. As parents, we are our children’s first teachers. Young children learn through modeling. How we act and convey our messages to them may affect how they act and convey their messages to others.

HOW TO USE OUR TOOLS WITH CHILDREN

**Hands:** Use nonverbal communication to inform the child that he/she is safe and loved.

**Words:** Soft, warm, and uplifting words of encouragement.

**Eyes:** Gaze into the child’s heart. Be on their level – it is not a power struggle.

**Presence:** Do things with each other. Engage.

Rhonda stated, “Do not change what the child is doing; change how that child is feeling.”
GENTLE TEACHING IS A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

I had the opportunity to meet Sylvia M. Fernandez-Colorado from Puerto Rico during a coffee break. She is a clinical psychologist with experience working in psychiatric wards, juvenile detention and rehabilitative centers, and private practice. I did not attend her session, titled: “Gentle Teaching: Transforming the Lives of Caregivers.” I heard positive feedback from many participants who had the privilege to hear her speak. Before the session began, the audience was asked to leave the room. When Sylvia was ready, she invited them back in the room and hugged each person who walked through the door. This introduction led to an interesting session. Sylvia taught us that Gentle Teaching is a philosophy of life – it is not an intervention or a method. When you truly believe in the philosophy, it becomes genuine.

“Once people feel safe and loved, true happiness shines through.”
-Rhonda Miller

FORGIVE AND FORGET

The cycle of unconditional love...

THE FOUR H’S

Hurt: Somebody causes you pain.

Hate: You cannot wish the person who hurt you well.

Heal: You see the person in a new light: the magic eye!

Home: You invite the person back into your life.

This can apply for self-forgiveness.

SILENCE

We tend to be afraid of silence and want to fill it with noise. Sometimes the best way to be present is to embrace the silence while physically being there with the person. Remember to be genuine.
Mark Veen and Simone Schipper from Leekerweide, Netherlands presented a session called “Not Broken: How We Learn to Love Again. Building Safe and Loving Relationships with Young Adults with Intellectual Disability and Broken Hearts.” They spoke to us about Wesley. We watched a video of him during a “kitchen table talk” with John McGee. Wesley, who was once a boy who felt lost, found safety and love through the dialogue of Gentle Teachers. The description of the session states: “When we work towards a spirit of companionship, challenging behavior can disappear, personal growth can begin, and people whose hearts seem to be broken can learn to feel loved, and love in return once again.” Through the supports under the Gentle Teaching philosophy, Wesley has learned to express his feelings through rapping, poetry and beat boxing.

Wesley’s poems were printed and placed on the tables during the session. One of them is entitled: “Leaving the Past Behind.” When the light turns into dark; when the place whose secret has been found; when you turn your back to me; and when the flowers are going to die, please never forget that I will be there if you need me... And when the sun goes down, take me home walking down the roads and rivers and leaving the past behind.
The Gentle Teaching International Conference 2013 participants were invited to create a message on a piece of fabric that would be a part of a Gentle Teaching quilt. The quilt will symbolize the beauty and strength within the Gentle Teaching community. It will be revealed at the Gentle Teaching International Conference 2014 in Greece!

**Arcane Horizon Inc.’s contribution to the Gentle Teaching quilt:** The image in the middle of the fabric represents the tools that we need to teach the four pillars of Gentle Teaching. The people at the bottom symbolize human interdependence, and how practicing the Gentle Teaching philosophy allows us to help each other grow and achieve common goals.
WE’RE ON A BOAT CRUISE!

RIVERBOAT TOUR

On Tuesday, September 17, 2013, we went on a boat cruise through Shearwater Tours. We walked to the dock from the hotel to catch the boat before it left shore at 6:30pm.

Picture on the right: We enjoyed being a part of the large group that walked to the riverboat tour!

Picture on the bottom: We relaxed on the boat cruise as we explored Saskatchewan. We sat together while we shared stories and snacks.

One of the highlights of the trip was spending the evening with new friends!
On the evening of Wednesday, September 18, 2013, we attended the Gentle Teaching banquet. The pictures portray how much fun we had meeting new people over a fabulous dinner, watching a group of young ladies, called The Spirit Flyers, perform routines, and dancing the night away with fellow Gentle Teachers from across the world!
Linsay had the opportunity to share her thoughts about her experience at the Gentle Teaching International Conference 2013. She was very brave to speak in front of a large group of people! Good job!

We gathered in the “Sheraton Centre” banquet hall on our last day of the Gentle Teaching International Conference 2013. We had the opportunity to share our thoughts about our experiences. Near the end of the last gathering, the event organizers lined up in front of the room and were thanked for hosting an event that provided a lot of insight into the philosophy that we share.

The group of people who helped organize the event stood up in front of the audience to receive acknowledgement from Maurits. They did a fantastic job hosting this conference!

Maurits announced exciting news for the Gentle Teachers... the Gentle Teaching International Conference 2014 will be held in Greece!

When Stephanie and Linsay were asked, “What was the best part of the conference?” They both responded that their favourite part was meeting new people from across the world, especially from far away places like the U.K.!
They call it the front lines, but this is the opposite of war, where my army and I disarm ourselves to equip lives with quality.

They call me the support, which is sort of strange given that the life I support supports me through these dollars and hours spent...

Earning the many ways to be broke. But I do not make piecemeal personas from doctors' diagnoses.

Angelman, Asperger, Williams, Tourette and many other men have hung their names on you. Names not yours, so I don't mind if you don't remember mine...

Because despite all the fun we've had, our share of forgettable moments, and I'd rather not embolden regrettable omens from the past, especially for all those times I've felt a coward for only letting you hurt me as much as I know I can take without breaking down, soothing curses with assurances, meeting hard closed fists with soft open palms, but waiting until you are gone to cry.

These intimate boundaries are front lines advancing, hugging each other with refusal to surrender.

I wonder what you'd think if I told you I once threatened my roommate, too. Except our house was a hospital. I'm pretty sure I saw your roommate there. We were yelled at by the same nurse.

So I've learned not to raise my voice with him now that I've popped back out the other side of the bubble pack, asking you to take your meds as my memory echoes mornings I'd refuse, the circles around my head staring straight lines up in the distance. These stable cycles are punishing rewards, but at least they keep us honest.

I know I am too firm at times, but I will not hurt you even though I might not like the way you treat me or get the way you stretch me, I respect the way you teach me.

No one is immune to ups and downs, syndromes and surprises. Struggle disables us all, but only to bring us closer...

Where everyone feels the first breath of a premature fetus trying to drink eternity under the timetable until the hangover of being born into your sufferance channels my sentience into your sustenance...

On what they call the front lines, circling back to a standoff that doesn't sit well as your deepest moments of crisis shriek inside of me, reminding me of breaking myself coming back to earth.

So when my eyes become tired and silent, it's because I can't help it either. The maddening voice and hyper accelerated pulse, These adversaries should be allies, for they are dangerous strangers. Psychosis is no split-personality; this is who I am with you, and surely autism is no retard, brilliant and merciless like the debilitating powers of idiot savants, playground taunts of awkward hearts denied their full affections.

So when a close friend asks my professional opinion on how best to support a loved one, it is a personal question that pester me relentlessly.

This is just a job like love is just an emotion, necessary, powerful, and humbling. Even if I am just your guardian stranger, I am grateful to feel safe here beside you as we learn gently with laughter, bringing me back to earth again in the blessing of being witness to your overcoming joy healing us together.
GENTLE TEACHING IS...

FRIENDSHIP

Feeling Safe

Conversation

UPLIFTING OTHERS

PEACE

Unconditional

Acceptance

LAUGHTER

Hugs

Smiles

ENCOURAGEMENT

MENDING THE HEART

Developing a sense of self-worth

MAKING MEMORIES

Happiness

TRUST

Strength

Genuine

INSPIRATION

UNDERSTANDING

What does Gentle Teaching mean to you?

BEING IN THE MOMENT

Love

FEELING ENGAGED WITH OTHERS

Share the love

Peace

Unconditional

Acceptance

Felt love

Live Love

Laughter

Laughter

Happiness

Inspiration

Unconditional

Acceptance

Developing a sense of self-worth

Healing

Feeling Safe

Genuine

Being in the moment

Comfy

Unconditional

Acceptance

Healing

Encouragement

Comfort

Unconditional

Acceptance

Unconditional

Acceptance

Sharing

Shalom