

An Anniversary
by
Daniel E. White September 9, 2024

On Monday, September 13, 2004, 191 students enrolled in grades pre-kindergarten through seventh, 30 faculty and staff, and a sizeable number of parents gathered in the Elementary School building for the first day of school for Island Pacific Academy. Everyone was excited. Everything was new, a first. It was a unique day. There is, after all, only one first day.

That day happening was the result of countless accomplishments, some extraordinary in importance. To name a few: if families had not been willing to trust the education of their children to IPA, there would have been no school. If a faculty and staff of experienced professionals had not taken a chance by joining a school with no track record, no history, there would have been no first day to celebrate. These were crucial members of the village it took to start a school.

If Kiewit Construction, headed by Lance Wilhelm, had not completed a 28,000 square foot, two-story building (after ground-breaking in March) and secured a certificate of occupancy the first week of September, IPA would have had its first day elsewhere or outdoors. If Central Pacific Bank had not loaned \$6 million, if vendors had not delivered their wares on time; if, if, if.

That Monday morning in 2004, a host of “ifs” became “is.”

On Friday, September 13, 2024, IPA celebrates twenty years of operation. IPA students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, trustees, and friends; all will join together to recognize a success story, an idea turned into a set of values undergirding daily interactions among many constituencies, the sum of which is the school in 2024.

The idea for IPA came from members of the James and Abigail Campbell Family Trust. Its leaders saw the value of an independent school in Oahu’s “Second City” and gave one of their key people, Larry Caster, the responsibility to make it happen. The Trust provided land to lease and a way for the school to purchase its land in the future for a set price. Without Larry’s knowledge and skill, there would be no IPA to celebrate.

The set of values guiding the school were straightforward. We wanted to educate the students in our care and ourselves to the power of human kindness. We wanted those involved with the school, in whatever capacity, to demonstrate a generosity of spirit. Those two signature values were even written into the proclamation issued by the Hawaii State Legislature welcoming IPA into the community of independent schools on Oahu.

Those values were also the starting point for every conversation Judy and I had with prospective families. Then we would launch into explaining the academic and extra-curricular program we had in mind. That order—values first, program second—made an impression on the parents we met.

There was a third value. Much of education in the past has been so focused on content, reflecting this school of thought or that religious dogma, that, over time, the content blunted the natural curiosity inbred in every child. Left out of so many schools has been the understanding that an

effective educator coaches the natural instincts of children, which they have from the earliest age, to find out, to learn, to question, to think, sometimes differently than their teachers thought. Memorable teachers capitalize on the curiosity their students display. An underlying value from the first meeting of the faculty-in-waiting, the group that worked with Judy and me over many months to fashion the first academic programs, was the commitment to keep our children’s curiosity alive.

Among the notable people who were part of the Campbell Family Trust was Alice Guild. In time, Alice became a great friend, first and foremost, to Judy and me, and to IPA as well. I mention Alice not just for her Campbell connection but also for the wisdom she shared with others for over ninety years.

In particular, I note how she responded when her eldest grandson asked her for advice about what was important in life. “Be curious,” she replied. Those who knew Alice know that she lived that advice.

That is a hope we have for IPA, for the adults and youngsters who comprise the school at any given time: be curious, ask why, look for better ways to do things, experiment, question, be true learners for a lifetime. We recognize that there are plenty of people and causes and belief traditions that would prefer you to see their way of thinking adopted as truth, to the exclusion of curiosity. We wanted to produce principled people who could think critically, independently.

IPA celebrates this year a signature anniversary. There will be more anniversaries to follow. What we care most about is that the founding values—kindness, generosity of spirit, and a commitment to curiosity seem still to be hallmarks of IPA. May it always be so.

To the people of IPA today is entrusted the stewardship of, not just a school, its buildings and its programs, but of its core values, foremost. Without the core values, I believe, there would not have been a first day of school at IPA, September 13, 2004.

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