



DOWNTOWN BALTIMORE CHILD CARE, Inc.
 Park Avenue Center, 806 Park Ave., Baltimore, MD 21201-4807 • 410-669-1010
 University Center, 237 Arch Street, Baltimore, MD 21201-1526 • 410-659-0515

October, 2005

“Dear Pinkee”

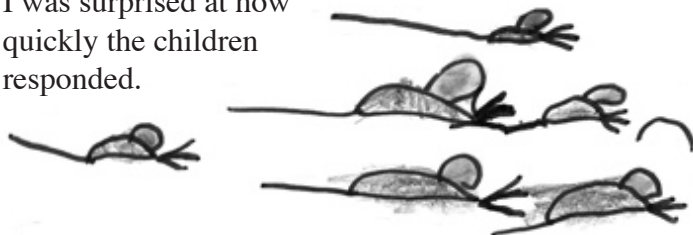


Encouraging writing in the Pre-school Classroom

by Susan Sandstrom

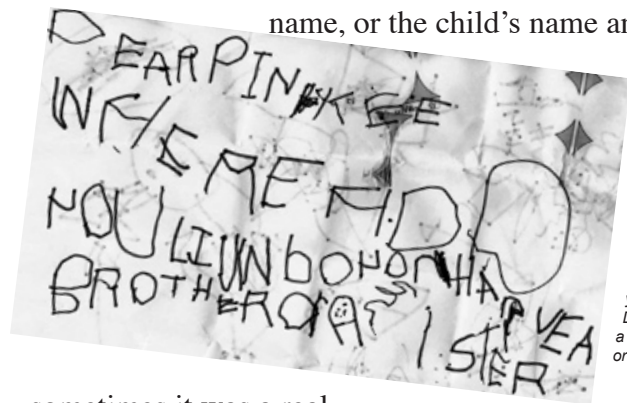
Last fall, as I was walking by Room 6, I noticed the four-year-old children were having some trouble settling down for rest time. I stopped in and offered to tell a story once everyone was on his/her cot. I made up a story on the spot about Pinkee the mouse who lived on the playground under the woodchips and who visited the classroom every day. I told a Pinkee story almost every day for a couple of weeks and then less and less often as the year progressed. As I chronicled his adventures he became real to the children and they beseeched me to TELL A PINKEE STORY every day.

I wanted to capitalize on the children’s interest but I wondered how since I wasn’t a teacher in their classroom. At DBCC we look to the children to steer curriculum. If the children are interested in something we search for ways to “extend their play,” to make it more complicated or sophisticated or to teach skills or concepts. One of our former kindergarten teachers used to have her students write to a mouse in her classroom and I thought why not Pinkee. I was curious to see whether I could provoke these pre-literate children into writing to a mouse. I used a ripped up scrap of paper and printed a very tiny letter from Pinkee that I casually left on the classroom floor. The children found the note and the teacher read it aloud. I was surprised at how quickly the children responded.



Suddenly Pinkee was inundated with mail! Every time a child wrote or drew a picture for Pinkee, he wrote back. Thus began a major correspondence between a mouse and a classroom of children.

The children created a tiny mailbox for Pinkee inside the classroom that would fill with paper. The younger children in the room -not quite sure what was going on but interested in the process, would stuff blank paper in the mailbox. Many of the letters Pinkee received were drawings but most of them had some words on them. Sometimes the letters had Pinkee’s name, or the child’s name and



(Dear Pinkee - Where are you living? Do you have a brother or a sister?)

sometimes it was a real note. I loved those. I depended on the teachers to identify the authors of much of the mail. Besides mail, I also found food, pieces of foam fashioned into mouse furniture, blankets and other assorted items for Pinkee’s mouse hole. He also received a post card from Florida from one of the children and, during the heat of the summer, a swimming pool.

One particularly interesting project inspired by Pinkee was a large diorama of Pinkee’s house.

(Cont'd on page 2)

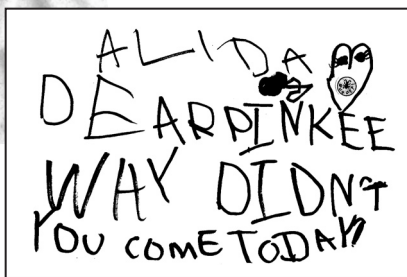
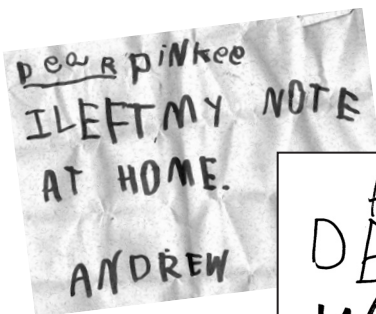


Dear Pinkee” (Cont’d from pg. 1)

In the house was a TV, a bed, a sleeping bag (created out of cloth), chairs, tables, etc. with each item labeled clearly. The children also wrote their names prominently on the house.

The older children loved the idea of writing letters and as their writing improved they started writing me directly, as well as Pinkee. I received thank you notes, pictures or messages from the children. *The water table leaks* or *We need tape*. I answered each of these notes until I was overwhelmed with mail almost every day. The children in Room 6 loved to get a personal letter back from me so the letters kept coming and coming. The children created a mailbox for me out of an old box and labeled it “Susan’s Mail.”

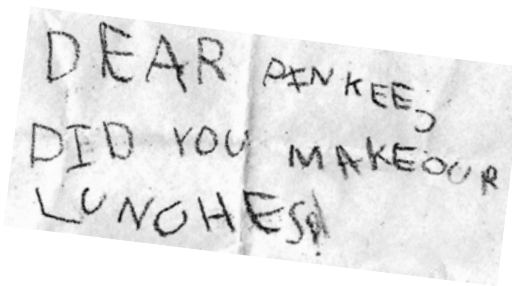
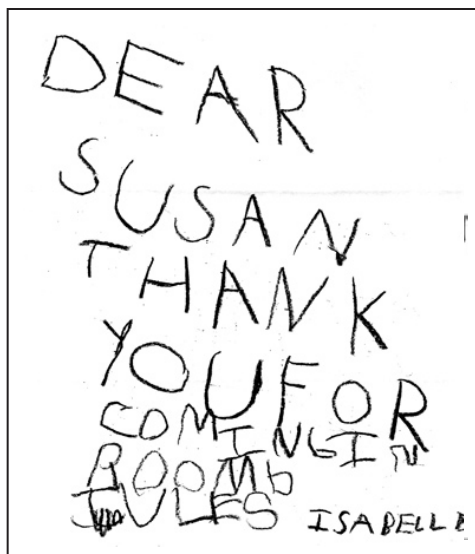
It was precariously hung outside of their door and it is where I picked up and delivered my mail. Soon I was writing daily



letters on behalf of Pinkee and myself.

It was important to me that every letter be answered but it was hard to get any of my other work done!

The beauty of these notes was that they were child initiated. Writing is a dialogue between the reader and the writer and by perpetuating the dialogue the children became avid writers. There was no “seat” work required where letters or words were drilled into the children. There was no homework (although some letters were written at home). The motivation came from the children with technical assistance from the teachers and parents. Some of the children worked very hard to write words, their effort quite visible in the awkward, shaky scrawl of their letters. Teachers and parents passed no judgment on the quality of their letters but celebrated the effort.



(Pinkee, there is no cat)

This kept the children encouraged.

As the writing continued a new twist



developed. *Miss Nelson is Missing* by Harry Allard was a favorite story. One day I found a letter addressed to Miss Viola Swamp, the scary substitute teacher in the book, in my mailbox. I answered the letter as a grouchy Miss Viola Swamp and when the children saw me next they said, “It’s really you writing, isn’t it.”

I told them yes, I was the one writing for Miss Viola Swamp. It didn’t seem to matter one bit. Now every time the children saw me they requested Pinkee stories with Miss Viola Swamp in the story as well.

One day a few of the children confronted me—was I really writing the Pinkee notes? “Yes,” I confessed. “I was writing the Pinkee notes.”

“See,” said one child. “I told you; mice can’t hold a pen.”

Not everyone was convinced but after a few days the controversy was over and nothing more was said about it to me. Yet, the Pinkee letters continued without interruption.

Around mid-summer the writing abruptly stopped. I mentioned to the children that my mailbox had been empty for a long time. (One child pointed out that there were two pushpins in it so it wasn’t empty.) The children were busy with other projects so I thought their letter writing phase was over. When children are allowed to follow their own interests (as they are in DBCC’s Emergent Curriculum), they tend to go through phases that last for anywhere from a day to six months or even longer. I was pleased that the

children had lasted this long with their letter writing.

As the summer progressed I discovered one day that my mailbox was stuffed again with mail and the children were teasing for me to answer their letters.

I answered each letter but my mail stopped after that. They were done.

What a wonderful time I had maintaining this correspondence! It was usually the older children in the group who wrote, but every child participated at least once. When I signed my notes with an embellished SUSAN the next note I received was invariably signed with embellishment. If I wrote in block letters the next note I received used block letters. We played with the alphabet. We played with the mail and when we saw each other we played some more. When the children saw me I was always greeted with

ISABELLE
SUSAN



tell a Pinkee stor-ee'
tell a Pinkee stor-ee'

repeated over and over to a samba beat which started me and the children dancing-or at least me. We played with stories and ideas and because of the play, the children learned a tremendous amount-but, most of all, we had fun!

Dear pinkee
I found my other
note at home
And I'm gonna
have two notes
one from pinkee

*(Dear Pinkee,
I found my other
note at home
and I'm gonna
have 2 notes,
one from Pinkee)*

DEAR RINKY HOPE YOU HAVE A
GOOD DAY BUT WATCH OUT FOR
MISS VIOLA SWAMP
LOVE
ANDREW



Ask Aliceanna...

Dear Aliceanna,

Some days I have the hardest time getting my child to listen to me. I call him again and again and he acts like I'm not there. If I get angry he will respond but I don't want to have to get to such an extreme place before he listens. He is also starting to run away from me so I have to chase him around the grocery store. I'm afraid he will run into the road one day. I am furious when I finally catch him because he thinks it is funny.

I'm not ready for Nanny 911 but if this continues much longer I may be tempted. Help!

Signed, Mom

Dear Mom,

Your problem is very common and can be remedied with consistency. Your child needs you to physically follow-through once you give him a direction. He needs to be convinced that once you say something you will insist that it be done. You will get up off the sofa and take away the offending toy, you will leave when you say you are leaving and you will do what you say you are going to do. Don't forget that language has little power if it is not backed up. Once you establish that you mean what you say, you can stop with the physical follow through. It will no longer be necessary.

Here's what you do: Give him a warning - "Five more minutes and then we have to go." Then take him by the hand and say, "Time to go." No anger, no tone other than pleasant. If he struggles, grip tighter and say once again, "Time to go." Be prepared for him to run so don't let go. Hang on, keep the conversation light and direct the child's thoughts to dinner or Dad or the goldfish waiting at home to be fed. If he says, "LET ME GO!" Tell him softly, "I need you to stay with me." If he drops to the floor or fights, pick him up and carry him. When you reach your car and he is safely in his car seat say, "It is very important for you to be a good listener."

Don't give in and don't give up. The problem will probably escalate before it gets better so hang on. In any environment where you suspect there will be a problem, take him by the hand. He needs to be under your control at all times. Once you are sure you can trust him start easing up but not too much. Aliceanna would also not take any chances around roads or parking lots and always take him by the hand.

With perseverance and consistency you will have a child who respects your words and who understands limits. But, you have to always mean what you say!

[Aliceanna loves to hear from you. Drop her a line at uc@dbcckids.org or drop your question in the tuition box at either center.]

M•I•L•E•S•T•O•N•E•S

Robin Conners, early childhood specialist, environment designer and one of DBCC's closest friends, passed away on April 12, 2005. Robin Conners worked with former executive director, Nancy Kramer, for years before DBCC opened. In her retirement, Robin spent many hours volunteering at DBCC. She was responsible for many of the playground and classroom ideas and came up with the wonderful lighted showcases as you enter University Center. Whenever DBCC launched on a new project we called in Robin as a creative consultant!



Many people saw Robin's white hair and thought of her as a little old lady. It was the perfect disguise because she was one of the youngest people you'd ever meet. During the most serious of meetings, her sparkly eyes would narrow and she would make hilarious comments to whomever was beside her. She would remain poised and attentive and everyone around her would be laughing. Robin had a memorable laugh and we loved to keep her laughing as well-which wasn't hard. She saw the irony in everything. Robin was one of those rare people who enlivened us with her incredible joie de vivre!

Robin took special interest in children who needed a little extra love and attention. She loved to discuss children's needs and was always helpful to those of us who needed a fresh perspective. She would come to the center regularly to be with a specific child and become that child's special friend. She made a difference in the lives of so many young children.

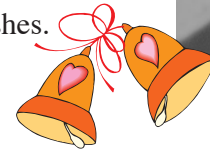
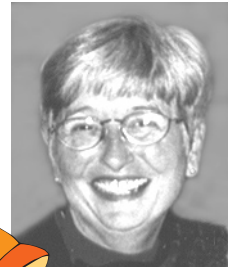
One of Robin's favorite things was garage sales. She would go early Saturday morning to be the first one there to grab all the unusual stuff for us to use in the classroom. When Robin arrived at the center we invariably had to walk with her to her car to help her unload. Her car was always stuffed with things and we never knew what she'd bring. She was especially excited when she had something extra unusual-a steel drum, a wall hanging or an old jewelry box full of costume jewelry. DBCC was probably the only center to have a pelican skeleton and a stuffed mongoose in the classroom. We were always well stocked with hats, dress-ups and scarves and Robin took the added initiative to alter the dress-ups so they were child size.

Robin understood curriculum better than most people. If Robin walked in your room you could be sure that she

would have some impact on the classroom. What would start as a simple face painting activity would suddenly subvert into body painting because of Robin's influence. She attended a staff workshop one morning and while everyone was making a hand mold out of alginate, she took her shoe and sock off and made a foot mold. She was unpredictable and always fun. In that spirit, Park Avenue's first rabbit was named lovingly in her honor.

Robin touched many of us at DBCC. She was someone who never lost her ability to play or be playful. She was always upbeat, fun, wise and attentive-an original. She gave so much to each of us and she will be deeply missed.

Pat Hillers and Jim Slantis were married on February 26, 2005. The Slantis' honeymooned in the Dominican Republic and will reside in Pat's house in Homewood. Pat and DBCC go back a long way! In 1983 Downtown Baltimore Child Care opened its doors and Pat was the Administrative Assistant. Pat has been a wonderful friend and supporter and we send her and Jim our love and best wishes.



CHILDSPEAK

• Daniel Schuck, age 4, was having a discussion about heaven with a couple of the children in his classroom. He said:

“Angels are busy with God.”

• Peter French, age 4, told the teacher: “You smell like the Disney Hotel!”

• Peter French, age 4, told the teacher: “You smell like the Disney Hotel!”

One of Peter's teachers was pregnant. Her belly button was protruding through her clothes and Peter said, “That's the baby's penis because he is a boy.”

• Jordan Love, age 7, was asked to bring his grandmother's clothes upstairs. He brought everything but her slip. Jordan went back downstairs to get the slip and he was able to identify the correct slip and bring it upstairs. “How did you know which slip was your grandmother's?” asked his mother. “I smelled it and it smelled just like Grandmommy.”

• Aaron Haettenschwiller, age 4, said, “I'm going to be a veterinarian when I grow up. Liam McDanolds, age 4, advised, “Well, you gotta eat a lot of vegetables.”

★THE FIVE YEAR CLUB★

The new school year is underway and while we are enjoying our new DBCC families, we are sad to say goodbye to families who have been with DBCC for five or more years. We call it the Five Year Club because these families have made a special long term commitment to DBCC.

★ **Peg McCarthy** and **Greg Ball** started their infant son, **John**, at University Center in 1998. Two years later Alice entered the infant room. John is currently at Gilman and Alice started Bryn Mawr this fall. DBCC appreciates all the support and commitment Peg and Greg have demonstrated over the years. Peg is a current Board member and past president. Peg is responsible for DBCC's wonderful web site and Peg and Greg have been tireless advocates and generous donors for DBCC!

★ **Allison** and **Paul Bessette** enrolled their daughter **Alex** in Park Avenue's two-year-old room in 1998. **Hayden** was born the following year and he started at University Center's infant room. Allison is a former Board member and chaired a very successful spring event a few years ago. Allison and Paul have been advocates of DBCC and we thank them for their generous donations and support over the years.

★ **Ron Ouwerkerk** and **Meik Segers-Ouwerkerk** enrolled their infant son, **Jules** in September of 2000. Jules left this fall to attend Roland Park Public School. Meik is a former Board member. Thank you Ron and Meik for your generous support through the years!

★ **Karen Forget** and **Tom Davis** started at DBCC when their daughter **Caroline** was a toddler. She stayed until she entered kindergarten and we didn't see Karen and Tom for about four years-until **Ben** arrived! Ben started in the fall of 2002 and left this fall to attend Sparks Elementary School where his mom works. Thank you Karen and Tom for your generous support over these many years!

★ **Glen Gaddy** and **Robin Kolodny** enrolled **Eleanor** as an infant in 1999. Eleanor stayed until she started kindergarten at Roland Park Country School. In the fall of 2003 Robert started in the infant room. **Robert** was only with us two years because the family moved to Pennsylvania this summer. Thank you Robin and Glen for all of your support and contributions over the years!

★ **Martha Holleman** and **Jim French** enrolled **Jack** in the fall of 1999. **Peter** was born in 2000 and entered the infant room at University Center. Jack gradu-

ated to his local public school and this fall Peter joins his brother. Jim is a current Board member and part of the Facilities Committee. Many thanks to Martha and Jim for their dedication and support over the years!

We miss all of you! Thank you for sending us your very lovable children. What fun it has been watching them grow! Please stay in touch with us. It's families like yours that have helped DBCC become such a special place!

Where Are DBCC's Children Going to Kindergarten and First Grade?

DBCC kindergarten - 8
Grace & St. Peter's School - 2
City Public Schools - 5
Bryn Mawr - 4
Park School - 8
Waldorf School - 1
Parochial School - 1



Baseball player
by Peter French, age 5
(The reason he drew a Yankee is because he didn't know how to make a cursive O.)

It's a Boy! 😊 It's a Girl!

😊 Sabria is a big sister! **Hana Mary Elizabeth Roggendorf** was born on April 21, 2005 and weighed 7 lbs. 2 oz. Congratulations to Sabria, Adrian and Kurt!

😊 Ruby is a big sister! **June Martha Heslin** was born on July 6, 2005 and weighed 8 lbs. 8 oz. Congratulations to Ruby, Charlene and Grant!

😊 Leena is a big sister! **Neel Singh** was born on July 6, 2005 and weighed 6 lbs. 14 oz. Congratulations to Leena, Ila and Alok!

😊 Brian is a big brother! **Kevin James Graziano** was born on July 20, 2005 and weighed 6 lbs. 7 oz.

Jessica Lynn Graziano was also born on July 20, 2005 and weighed 6 lbs. 2 oz. Congratulations to Jean, Jack and Brian!

😊 Naomi is a big sister! **Magnus Andrew Larson** was born on August 1, 2005 and weighed 7lbs. 14 oz. Congratulations to Dorothy, Scott and Naomi!

😊 Alumni Jason Knowles has a new baby brother! **Chase McCormick Sunter** was born on August 8, 2005 and weighed 8 lbs. 3 oz. Congratulations to Alex, John, Jason, Brandt, Conrad and YiaYia!

😊 Tai Daniels is a big brother! **Kyle Eric Thurston** was born on August 19, 2005 and weighed 8 lbs. 5 oz. Congratulations to Melissa, Tai and Grandma Leslie!

😊 Jonathan is a big brother! **Phoebe Teresa Marcuse** was born on August 19, 2005 and weighed 8 lbs. 4.5 oz. Congratulations to Fatima, Ken and Jonathan!

SPECIAL THANKS TO...

* All of the parents, grandparents, children, friends and families who have donated toys, books, art supplies, food, pets, clothes and dress-up props.

* **Shareef Jakes** for his rocking chair.

* **Steve Dahl** and **Irene Kim**, Anna's parents, for their generous donation of a new color printer for the office and a new CD player for the classroom. Steve has spent hours helping us unravel the mysteries of our computers. He has also supplied computer components to update our Macs and has been an invaluable source of information!

* **Robert Shuck**, Andrew and Daniel's dad, for his generous donation towards University Cen-

ter's video camera fund. Robert did work for his clients and had them pay DBCC, instead of him! Robert and his crew donated a day to working on all of University Center's maintenance problems!

* **Hope Jahren** and **Clint Conrad**, Charles' parents, for buying and installing new shades for the classroom. Also thank you to **Bill Hagopian**, Charles' godfather, for his handyman skills.

* **Will Karr**, Isabel's dad, for the beautiful new cabinet doors.

* **Diane Shaw**, Ryland's mom, for sewing curtains for the classroom.

* **Lori Paine**, Zeke and Emma Texter's mom, for sewing pillows with the fours at Park Avenue.

**Did you know that DBCC
can be designated to receive
United Way Funds?**



Contributions can be made through the United Way of Central Maryland, the Maryland Charity Campaign or the City Combined Charity Campaign! **Our number is 3537.** Please pass this along to friends and co-workers.



Downtown Baltimore Child Care, Inc.
806 Park Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21201-4807

Address service requested

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BALTO. MD.
PERMIT NO. 5402



*Childhood should be
a journey, not a race.*