

## LIVING LEGACY PRESENTATION

Marie M. Dugan  
AMS 2009 Annual Conference  
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### “Building on Success: Keeping Our Community of Commitment”

It gives me great pleasure to be the AMS Living Legacy Honoree in this year, 2009, which also marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my involvement with the American Montessori Society. Back in 1968, I was, as many of you have been, simply a parent, looking for a good school for my three year old daughter, Annette. Fortunately, I found a Montessori School in Wilmington, Delaware. It was in that very first experience that I began to see that teachers are the heart of our classrooms, the secret of Montessori education. And teachers are what the Living Legacy Scholarship Fund is all about.

I know that many of you in the room today are teachers. My remarks today are in honor of you.

I have dedicated myself this year to continue to work toward helping more teachers prepare for their Montessori teaching credential through our programs. They are all accredited by MACTE, the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, a federally recognized agency. For gaining this important governmental recognition in 1995, we all owe a great debt of gratitude to the leadership of the late Joy Starry Turner and to all those who took part in that work.

My remarks today are titled, “Building on Success: Keeping Our Community of Commitment.” When I think about this 102<sup>nd</sup> year of the worldwide Montessori movement and the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of AMS, I cannot help but think that no matter how successful AMS has become: 1,200 member schools, 92 teacher education programs, 11,000 parent and teacher members, 106 accredited schools; we must continue to look to the future.

We must go forward to reach more children in more diverse settings, more cultures, more languages and more countries. I am reminded that our founder, the late Dr. Nancy McCormick Rambusch, and teacher educator and former board member, Professor John McDermott, contended at the very beginning that in order to sustain the Montessori movement in America, we need to be in public schools. Well, we are there now in growing numbers. Congratulations and thanks to everyone who helped to make this happen—especially to the superintendents, board members, teacher education centers, parents, and city and state legislators who set the foundation for this and for the continuing growth of our public Montessori schools.

Nancy Rambusch was my mentor, my inspiration and my friend. She consulted regularly at the Wilmington Montessori School in the 1970s and 1980s when I was head of school. She influenced curriculum, classroom design, and the mission of the school. She often

talked about the success of the co-op program in Wilmington where every parent is a partner with teachers. Nancy looked at AMS as a parent-social movement. We must remember that it was Nancy's travels in the early 1960s to meet with parents throughout the country who wanted a new way of learning for their children, and AMS responded with the formation of the society. AMS became the contact support system for the hundreds of new schools that were formed at that time.

Nancy was a visionary with incredible talent for use of language and common sense and she had a most unusual sense of humor. One of my favorite quotes from Nancy was, "Montessori tells us to 'follow the child.' I say: first *catch* the child and then *follow* the child." As we were developing the school's strong elementary education program some years ago, Nancy said to me, "After years of reflecting on this, it is my feeling that the elementary child needs "an authoritative teacher that is a good sort but she means business." Among her many gifts to us was help in defining the developmental differences and needs between the flow from early childhood nurturing and into greater independence in the elementary years.

It was also Nancy who urged me to become active in AMS. She listened to my complaints that more needed to be done to help schools: more services, more public relations support, and more professional development for teachers and school administrators. So, I joined the AMS Board to help develop better services. I was elected board president and served for 5 years and then an additional 8 years as an at-large member, treasurer of the board and the first chair of the Heads of Schools Section.

I thank all of the current and former AMS Board members, now under the inspired leadership of President Marilyn Stewart, for their commitment to all of us. I have great admiration for everyone who serves on the board. They all lead busy lives, yet somehow add the work of the society to their schedules. I also thank Rich Ungerer and the AMS office staff for their important support for the membership.

Former national director and 2004 Living Legacy honoree, Bretta Weiss Wolff, has been an important mentor to me since we met 30 years ago. Bretta is a remarkable leader, a dear friend and best of all, together, we make a dynamic team. We are currently cocordinators of the Course for School Management at the College of New Rochelle. Our opinions are often at opposite polls. Our students really love that and then appreciate the blending of our ideas, leading to consensus. And we love working with another dear friend, Carole Wolfe Korngold, who is the executive director of CMTE.

AMS's association with the United Nations is one of the most important alliances that we have. AMS is one of the UN's "NGO," or nongovernmental organizations that speaks for the rights of children, ending poverty, and promoting peace. Dr. Ruth Selman and Lesley Nan Haberman have been our NGO representatives for many years. It is my great honor to be one of the representatives since 1998.

I am chair of the AMS Archives Committee, a small group that has worked to organize and preserve the AMS papers and history first at Teachers College, Columbia University,

and, since 2006, thanks to Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd and his family, at the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut. Recently, Lakshmi Kripalani, a student of Dr. Montessori's, donated her important lifelong Montessori papers, documents, and recordings, to the collection. Thank you, Lakshmi.

Douglas Gravel, Phyllis Povell, Carolyn Dodd, and the late Marcy Raphael and Gilbert Donahue deserve recognition for their dedicated work to establish and maintain our history. Douglas and Maria Gravel are AMS historians. They were there at the beginnings of the Society in the late 50's and early 60s, and they are still working in support of the society. I thank them for their friendship and endless contributions to the American Montessori Society.

People like to talk about my involvement with raising money for AMS. Some ask why I continue this difficult work. I have a story to share with you about me. It is an important part of my life's journey. I grew up as the middle child in a family of five children in a little house in Swoyerville, Pennsylvania. My father was an immigrant. Both of my parents had strong feelings and a commitment to making sure that all five of us would get college degrees. We all did. I was awarded a full academic scholarship to College Misericordia when I was 16-years old. That college experience changed my life! It thrills me today to be able to help others who need assistance. The Society is here for its membership both nationally and internationally. I think of our organization as an extended family whose members need to provide ongoing support for one another.

AMS will now be able to distribute \$100,000 raised this year to many future teachers so they can achieve AMS credentials from our teacher education centers. I am so pleased to recognize and thank Eveline and Bob Roberts, who so generously offered the \$50,000 challenge grant. We could not have done this without them.

And, I personally recognize and thank the major donors who made it possible to match the grant. Their generous support of the Living Legacy Fund, in my honor:

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Wilmington Montessori School and the Montessori Teachers Association of Delaware

Park West Montessori School and Riverside Montessori School, New York City, NY

Judy McCartin Scheide and Bill Scheide, Princeton, NJ

Sakura Long, Casa Montessori School, Northridge, CA.

The Montessori Teacher Education Center, San Francisco Bay Area< CA

Deerfield Montessori Schools, Chicago, IL

And, I thank the many members and friends of AMS who have made, or will make, contributions in every amount, in my honor, in support of teachers everywhere, by way of the Living Legacy Fund.

I return to my initial belief. Teachers are truly the heart of our schools. They need our support in every way, from their own school communities, heads of schools, boards of directors, teacher education centers, and AMS. Teachers are in class every day with love and caring and teaching that makes a giant difference for the children. In 2007, teachers were honored with Dottie Feldman as a group by AMS as Living Legacies!

Many teachers from Wilmington Montessori School and the Montessori Teachers Association of Delaware are with me today to share my joy. The Wilmington Montessori School community held a wonderful party for me at my school in January. Many people in both groups participated in the fundraising for the scholarship fund, and almost \$10,000 was raised. Thank you for all you do every day for the children and their families.

One of the important aspects of teaching is what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. refers to as the worthiness of investing a lifetime of service. I quote:

*If you want to be important—wonderful.*

*If you want to be recognized—wonderful.*

*If you want to be great—wonderful.*

*But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.*

That's your new definition of greatness. And this morning, the thing that I like about it—by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great. Because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve, you don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.

And Montessori teachers all over the world are preparing the next citizens of the world to find their greatness through service to others

In conclusion, I want to thank my family for their lifetime support of my work. My mother was my first teacher and mentor. She was totally dedicated to me and our family. I wish that she were here today. My sister, Estelle is. And my children, George, Annette, Joanne and her husband, Ludovic, and my grandson, Hugo. Max will be with us at the California conference. And, my supportive husband, George Dugan. I've always felt that the men of Montessori deserve a party of their own, because of their generous sharing of the women in their lives. As you all know, it isn't easy to combine our wonderful families with our Montessori passion. I consider that to be the most successful triumph of my life!

I invite my family to join me on stage.

Thank you.

