

# The Enduring Legacy of Rudolf Steiner

By Anna Driehuyzen

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The year 2025 marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Rudolf Steiner, founder of the first Waldorf school and a visionary pedagogue whom we have to thank for more than the thousand Waldorf schools in existence today. It is worth taking a moment to contemplate what Waldorf education has contributed to our times. In many ways it is still in seed-like form in that it is relatively unknown; yet the Waldorf movement is dispersed throughout the world among a diversity of cultures and spans all segments of society. It is humbling to ponder the destinies of children whose lives have been touched and transformed by an approach to education that honours the divine essence and wisdom of childhood; and in so doing, enriches, challenges, and enlivens the work of the tens of thousands of teachers globally who are charged with this monumental task.

More than one hundred years in, Waldorf is a testament to the inspirational and forward-thinking nature of its founder. Across cultures and generations, Waldorf education's success is a testament to its foundational tenets—among them, that the child is of a threefold nature (head, heart, and hands); that childhood embodies an evolution through developmental stages; and that the individuality of each child is regarded as that of a being of physical and soul spiritual attributes.

For the first time in history, a thorough, unique, and all-encompassing blueprint of childhood was meticulously laid out by Rudolf Steiner. This blueprint has continued to give teachers the tools with which to address the physical, emotional, and intellectual needs

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of the child within a curriculum that encompasses the developmental and evolutionary nature of the individual and humanity. It is what has and will continue to make Waldorf education, in all its cultural variations and manifestations, relevant for children the world over, regardless of heritage, ethnicity, creed, or class.



In an age of increasing fragmentation, divisiveness, and fear, Waldorf education has been placed as a kind of bulwark against the elements that seek to destroy social cohesion and harmony. Rudolf Steiner foresaw the course humanity was on, and envisioned a pedagogy that would serve as an antidote to the ever increasing turbulence and disharmony of the times. To imbue children with a feeling and trust that the world is good, beautiful, and true in this day and age is a subversive act, almost heretical.

Yet if one is to distill Waldorf education to its very essence, it is these three principles upon which the foundation of child development rests. When in the first seven years of early childhood the child is enveloped with all that is good, he feels and is strengthened through love. In

the second seven year cycle when the child is surrounded by what is beautiful, she develops discernment. In the seven years encompassing adolescence and early adulthood, youth begin to awaken to what is true, wherein lies understanding and wisdom.

Despite all that Waldorf education has contributed to the pedagogical discourse on the global stage, it remains largely unrecognized, toiling steadfastly and modestly in the shadow of state schools worldwide—though undeniably there are growing contingents of public schools that are adopting some of the ideas and ideals of Waldorf education. Still, Waldorf education is up against powerful eco-



## ALUM

### *From TreeTops to Crisis Zones: Alum Elisa Navarro's Reflections on Leadership*

**Housatonic Valley Waldorf School, Class of 2009**

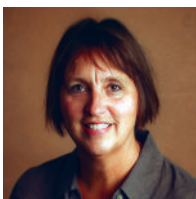
*Interview by Megan Vojack-Weeks*

conomic and ideological forces that run counter to its philosophical underpinnings, and are, in part, what hamper a more robust, unimpeded flourishing of Waldorf education.

The apple eaten by Snow White in the eponymous fairytale is perhaps an apt image for the tenor of our times. The apple appears red, sweet, and nutritious, when in fact it is fruit contaminated by poison, just as we live in an age when the most insidious harm is often conducted under the guise of kindness, empathy, and compassion. It remains a challenge for the movement to stay true to its foundational objectives without being swayed by the powerful counter-forces that seek to infiltrate all segments of society including working against what makes Waldorf a pedagogy for our times. Simultaneously, Waldorf is called to be responsive to the present age, evolving in its outlook and understanding of the world while reflecting the particular needs of children today. This is the razor's edge Waldorf finds itself on in 2025.

The centenary of the inception of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart was celebrated in 2019. The first school was developed for children of the working class and Steiner spared no effort in endowing it with the highest ideals and qualities. It is a painful irony that current political structures still keep Waldorf education out of range of most children in the lower socio-economic populations.

In 2025 we have the opportunity to reflect on the man himself and the vast inheritance that guides us now. One hundred years after Steiner's death, his prophetic insights cut to the very issues of our day and perhaps none so urgent as his petition in our confused, chaotic, contemporary world—"have courage for the truth."



Anna Driehuyzen has been on an extended sabbatical from eurythmy and class teaching. Currently she is bringing Waldorf pedagogy to a remote rural area of British Columbia where she teaches enthusiastic children in one of Canada's last one-room schools.



Even as a young child, Elisa Navarro embodied a caring and steady presence. She remembers once helping a frightened older student down from a high tree. "She was frozen, too

scared to move," Elisa says. "I climbed up, reassured her, and talked her through it, each move, until she reached the ground safely." Looking back, she sees that moment as her first real experience of leading under pressure—communicating clearly and helping someone regain their confidence.

Years later, she carries that same quiet strength to the front lines of humanitarian crises. Elisa now works with World Central Kitchen, an international relief organization that brings nourishing meals to communities affected by disaster. Whether it's a hurricane, wildfire, or mass displacement, Elisa is there within hours helping coordinate food, supplies, volunteers, and local partners. Her role is practical, yes. But at its heart, it's deeply human.

"I start small," she says. "I arrive, assess what's around—who's willing to help, what resources we can activate—and begin building from there."

In these moments of urgency, she leads with a blend of clarity, creativity, and care. "You can't treat this work like a checklist," she says. "You have to respond to what's needed, and that begins with really seeing the people you're with."

Her approach to leadership is shaped by more than her training—it's rooted in something deeper, some-

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