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ERIC HEINO | May 19, 2010 - 3:07 PM | 1

Alternative school students hold reunion

North York home to first alternative school in TDSB

Dozens of alternative schools in the TDSB can all trace their history to a single North York school in 1971. The first accredited high school of its kind in the Toronto area was the Alternative and Independent Study Program (AISP). It offered an unconventional take on learning to students looking for something a little different.

Educational pioneers who attended AISP between 1971 and 1981 are celebrating by hosting a reunion at the school's second location, now known as Avondale Alternative School.

Graduate Janyce Lastman is co-ordinating the event. The school was formed as the result of a petition signed by hundreds of students of the North York Board of Education at a time when anything seemed possible. The original petition will be showcased at the reunion.

"One article of it read something like, 'We, the students, rebel against the establishment.' The petition was written in 1970 and the school started in '71, so it had a real radical kind of flare to it."

There were no lockers, no football team. Industry professionals called "catalysts" worked alongside teachers to assist with lessons. It was a learning community that took in a variety of oddball types including computer programmers, early punk rockers and artists.

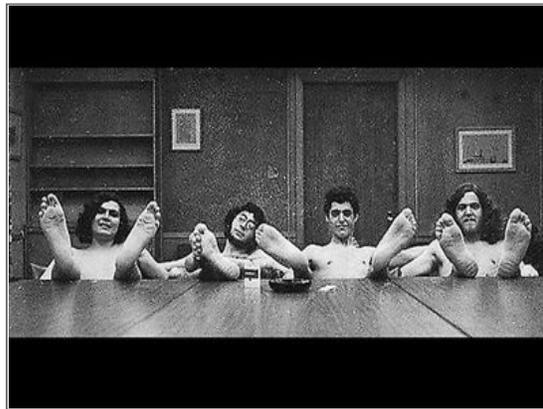
"Some of us came with As and some of us came with Fs because we didn't go to class, but we were all there because we were bright, creative and bored," said Lastman.

Students at AISP would take as few or as many classes as they wanted and completed them on their own schedule. They attended a few lectures a week and had optional tutorial periods, often held at locations outside of the school's walls.

At her regular high school Lastman easily earned straight As and was bored stiff. She signed up at AISP in Grade 12 and didn't tell her parents until a few weeks later. The school's unique approach appealed to the free spirits of the time and blazed a path for the future of education in Toronto.

"There was a lot of choice around timing and pacing, which did not exist at all at the time outside the school. There are lots of schools like that existing now, but at the time it was a revolutionary idea."

The goal of hosting a reunion for the first decade of attendees is two-fold. It's to have a groovy meeting with teachers, students and catalysts, but she also wants to make a statement about keeping choice alive within the public school system. Lastman has spent the last 25 years working as an educational consultant, matching the individual needs of families and students to schools that best suit them.



Alternative School students hold reunion. Stan Greenspan, left, Harold Glass, Andrew Friedland and Thad Griffin were students at the Alternative and Independent Study Program (AISP) in the 1970s. The school is hosting a reunion May 27 at Avondale Alternative school. *Photo/HINDY ZEIDENBERG, AISP FOUNDING STUDENT*

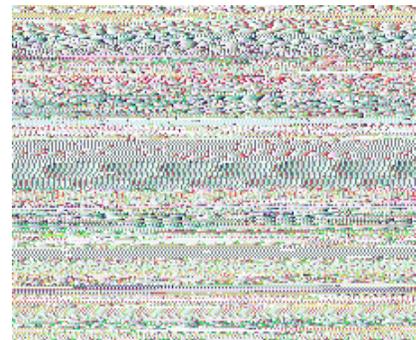
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