

## Waldorf Alumni Forum

# Rebecca Schmidt

CHARLOTTESVILLE WALDORF SCHOOL



*Rebecca with her mother, Vivian Jones-Schmidt*

I was privileged to have a Waldorf education, an education in which the arts live and flourish, and where both the community and the individual are celebrated and nourished. It is difficult to summarize the gifts of the Waldorf experience, partly because they expand and deepen with age. Yet there are some core legacies—perspective, awareness, and connectedness—that have absolutely guided my heart and steadied my path.

In a Waldorf school, children learn about the histories and cultures of the world in a direct, experiential way. By exposing children to the heroic deeds of individuals and the great strides of human cultures, Waldorf Education instills the realization that we are but tiny figures in the history of the world but also the empowering knowledge that we are in fact all creators.

In a time of struggle or ambition, of indebtedness or failure, the Waldorf student may recall the story of Gilgamesh and how this ancient hero overcame adversity; or how we as fifth graders rose to the challenges of our Olympiad. Or, we may meditate

on the life of a seed, to be reassured by the triumph of the forces of life and growth.

Waldorf students learn not only success but also failure, both personal and historical. Constantly encouraged to participate in activities in which they feel inferior, to confront fear of failure, students learn to focus on the action rather than the fear. They learn that “success” and “failure” are only terms, a matter of perspective.

There is no better training for diplomacy, for the appreciation of diversity, and for learning to forgive than to share your fears with your classmates for eight years, to support each other, to blame and choose to let blame go, in order to grow as human beings.

[The Waldorf experience] leads to an awareness of our connectedness, to the great responsibility of relating to nature and to each other.

A Waldorf education is an investment in and of the heart. It is an investment in the security of balance against extremism, in human connectedness, and in the health of our Earth and its future. There is no more pertinent investment than in “an education through which people can learn, once again, how to live with one another” (Rudolf Steiner).

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*Rebecca Schmidt grew up in Charlottesville, Virginia, and attended the Charlottesville Waldorf School from kindergarten through the eighth grade. Rebecca’s mother, Vivian Jones-Schmidt, was a class teacher at the school during that time, though not Rebecca’s teacher. After graduating in 1995, Rebecca attended Charlottesville High School and then Boston University. She majored in theatre arts and social work and graduated summa cum laude/Phi Beta Kappa. Her senior thesis, “Homeland Security,” a one-act play and accompanying paper on domestic violence, received an award.*

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## Books in Brief

### FUNCTIONAL MORPHOLOGY: THE DYNAMIC WHOLENESS OF THE HUMAN ORGANISM

by Johannes Rohen

Adonis Press, Hillsdale, New York, 2007  
430 pages plus an optional CD of illustrations, \$75.00

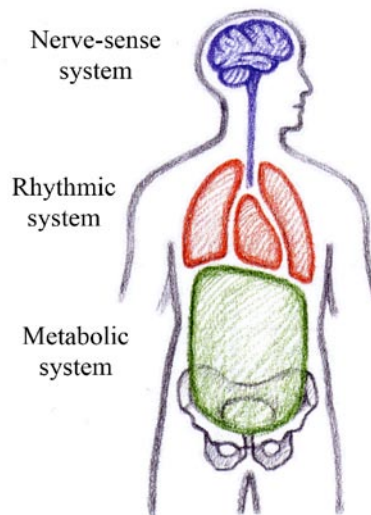
*Functional Morphology*, with its systematic descriptions of the various organs and organ systems of the human body and its many excellent illustrations, could be taken for a standard medical school anatomy textbook. And, in fact, the author, Dr. Johannes Rohen, is an internationally known author of anatomy textbooks.

But *Functional Morphology* is not just a book about human anatomy; it is a book about the human being. It is the result of Dr. Rohen's striving to combine the analytic and quantitative approach of modern science with a synthetic, qualitative one based on Goethean phenomenology. Rohen presents the human body as something which in every detail manifests a remarkable, even divine, wisdom and beauty. But he also recognizes the independent reality of the human mind and spirit.

The author describes, for example, how a visual image from the eyes is broken down and its component elements are sent to different parts of the brain. What allows us to experience a coherent image is the nonmaterial, integrating "I" or Ego. He also points out that the human body is

composed of mineral elements and compounds which in themselves are dead matter. What gives the human body life, movement, and growth is a spiritual entity that precedes, transcends, and survives it.

Rohen's lifetime of study has convinced him of the validity of orthogenesis. According to this idea, evolution has proceeded in a unilinear, apparently directed, manner due to some internal or external "driving force" to produce the human being. The lower animals are offshoots of this orthogenetic stream. They have adapted to specific environmental conditions and have become highly differentiated, one-sided, and incapable of much further development.



*The threefold structure of the human being*

The human being alone has maintained its primitive flexibility and adaptability and as such is the only bud on the tree of evolution capable of continued physical and spiritual evolution. Johannes Rohen points out that the brain has many areas that still have not developed. The human race is full of unimagined evolutionary potentials, including the possibility of acting in freedom and out of selfless love for others.

This monumental book, whose original German version is in its third edition, deserves to be studied carefully, so that its content and implications can be thoroughly appreciated. Hence, it would serve well as the basis for a teacher/parent study group in a school. Also, since much

of the book describes the threefold structure of the human organism, it would be useful to class teachers in presenting such blocks as the fourth-grade comparative study of the human being and the animal kingdom.

*Rebecca Schmidt, continued*

*After graduation, Rebecca spent a year traveling around Ireland and Scotland, pursuing her interest in Irish music. She is a gifted vocalist and sang in pubs and at fairs throughout Ireland. She then returned to Charlottesville and worked for two years at the local chapter of Planned Parenthood. Rebecca served there as community health educator, conducting prevention programs to improve the health of young people and their families. This experience caused her to decide on a career in public health policy and administration. She is currently pursuing a Masters in Public Administration in Public Policy and Management at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Rebecca enjoys writing songs, playing soccer, and exploring new places.*

*Rebecca's account of her Waldorf experience is an excerpt from a letter sent last year to members of the Charlottesville Waldorf School community.*