

## An ODS Parent Shares about the School, Children and More

By Jessica Solis-Ritchey

*As we enter into the Pre-school Registration period for 2010-2011, Jessica Solis-Ritchey, ODS family and UUCC member, shares her invaluable experiences from Open Door School:*

“Mom, may we use the duct tape, a hammer, nails and some of the left over bricks?” asks my breathless daughter. It’s a balmy Saturday in January as I look over from a cup of coffee I am enjoying with my neighbor to the expectant faces of my eight year old and her friend. They are dirty, slightly sweaty and their eyes are alight with excitement. “What are you doing?” I ask slightly concerned.

“We’re building a fort!”

I hesitate for a moment. “Oh. Well. OK.”

Once the girls gathered their supplies and left, my neighbor said she probably wouldn’t have given her kids the go ahead. She used the old, “You’re a better mom than I am”, but really, she thought I was crazy. I told her the kids used to make forts all the time when they were in preschool and that they had even had their own wood working sets. The exchange between the two of us prompted me to reflect on how their preschool experience at Open Door has really shaped me as a parent.

We spent 6 years at Open Door with 2 very different children. I say “we” because it was during those years that the foundation was laid for who we are as a family. We learned so much about the importance of allowing a child to grow and mature at his or her own pace and allowing myself and our family the same consideration. I learned to be more comfortable with the inherent uncertainty of parenthood.

Open Door showed me the importance of my children’s need to make choices and take ownership of the outcomes. The philosophy of learning from decision making suffuses everything the school does. In daily classroom life, a child’s choices and ideas often lead to the active child-initiated learning that happens day to day. This early experience of personal choice enhances the child’s innate desire to learn as well as pride in mastery and success.

Our children learned that their choices in relating to their peers could lead to collaboration and consensus or not. They also learned the natural consequences of both. As parents and guides we learned how to help them sort through these experiences.

As my children age we continue this focus on moral reasoning, respect and logical outcomes as a basis for the more difficult situations that arise as we navigate adolescence and beyond.

But today, my parenting challenges involve only fort building liberties and that type of perspective is something I learned from the Open Door School.

My neighbor and I eavesdropped as the girls (two ODS alum) drew their plan for this structure. We spied as they laid bricks on the ground to make a floor, used reassembled wood pallets for walls and then duct taped together the stalks of bamboo they had already cut down (with permission, thank goodness) and made the roof. We were quite impressed and decided we'd take them on our team if we ever went on Survivor.