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The Last Word

By Abby Miller, *Bank Street School for Children – 2011, The Dalton School – 2015*

My first day at Bank Street, in the 4/5s, was September 10, 2001.

The next day we all left early. Everyone was panicking, and no one really could explain why. But Bank Street helped us get through that day. We had meetings where we could talk about anything we were feeling. Some kids built tall buildings out of blocks and knocked them down and worked out their fears through play. Today, when I look back on my 10 years here, I'm grateful that Bank Street did more than give us a great education in humanities, math, and science. It also helped us deal with scary things and made us more aware of the world around us and how to make our way in it.

In the 6/7s we studied cities, and, at the end of the year, we got to make our very own city out of wine crates. Each of us got to choose what store we wanted to make, and we all got money to spend on everyone else's stores. I ran a restaurant, which brought in a decent income but nowhere near as much as my friend Katie's pet store. Though I don't think we realized it at the time, we were learning how to work together, how to resolve conflicts, and how individuals come together to make up a community.

As we began the 10/11s, we were all anxious about one looming event: the upper school dance. But Bank Street was not going to just throw us onto the dance floor unprepared. The week before, older kids taught us how to do some basic line dances such as the Cha-Cha Slide, The Cotton-Eyed-Joe, and the Electric Slide. They also showed us how to slow dance. The teachers demonstrated how to properly ask someone to dance and how to respond: with a yes. In the end, what might have been a tragically awkward evening brought us all together as a tightly-knit grade.

Sometimes, Bank Street helped us deal with our fears by making us face them. This year, my class participated in a poetry slam at the Nuyorican Poets Café. We all had to recite our poems on a professional stage in the East Village for a big audience of parents and teachers. I ignored the strong wish I had to fake being sick, or refuse to go on stage. After all, Bank Street had prepared me for public performance in years of assemblies where I stood up and talked about my Hudson River painting, or my experience at Frost Valley. I read my poem, and it helped me feel more comfortable on stage in Annie and at my spring violin recital.

This year, when we studied American government, we did more than read textbooks. In our mock Congress, I took on the role of Utah Senator Orrin Hatch and tried my best to argue against President Obama's health care plan. I was a justice in

our mock Supreme Court, and last month visited the real court where our class met Justice Sotomayor. We learned that making laws is messy, and that all of our constitutional rights have limits and exceptions.

The world still can seem like a scary place—that's one unfortunate lesson that a good education must include. But I'm grateful to Bank Street for showing me how to deal with that... And, of course, for teaching me how to do the Cotton-Eyed Joe.