



Fun With CATS



Fun With CATS #5. FWC is a collaboration between the Social Committee and the Director of Communications. It will be published occasionally until CATS is able to resume playing tennis. It's a way of keeping in touch with each other and remembering how much fun we have on and off the court. We'll look at photos of past events, share news about members or information about tennis instruction—anything we can think of that's fun and relevant to CATS! If you have suggestions, please contact Jim Vahey at jimvahey@sbcglobal.net.

Becky Corrigan is a science teacher at North Shore Country Day School, a private K–12 school in Winnetka. In mid-March, the school was preparing for a two-week spring break and Becky was planning a vacation in Santa Fe. Spoiler alert: Becky didn't go to New Mexico and the students didn't return to school after the break.

Becky said they knew something was happening. The day before what should have been the last day of school, teachers and students were told to “take everything home that you might need.” That would be the last day of classes inside the school for the rest of the school year, as North Shore Country Day joined schools, businesses, cultural institutions in closing to try to stop the spread of corona virus. Like teachers around the country, Becky soon found herself teaching remotely.



How did they do that? How did it actually work?

The media made it look like the teachers turned on a dime: in the classroom one day, teaching via Zoom the next. That may have happened in some schools, but North Shore had the luxury of the two-week break to plan and prepare before classes resumed: the school made sure every student had internet access — upgrading families' internet service where necessary — and the tech staff taught the teachers how to use Zoom.

Questions that had never been raised before had to be considered. “Should kids be required to be on mute until the teacher calls on them?” “Do you require kids to leave their cameras on all the time?” The school decided that in order to help students feel comfortable and in control during this stressful period, they would be allowed to choose

whether they wanted to be on camera or not. “Maybe they’re having a bad day, or maybe they’re not comfortable with other kids seeing their home,” Becky explained.

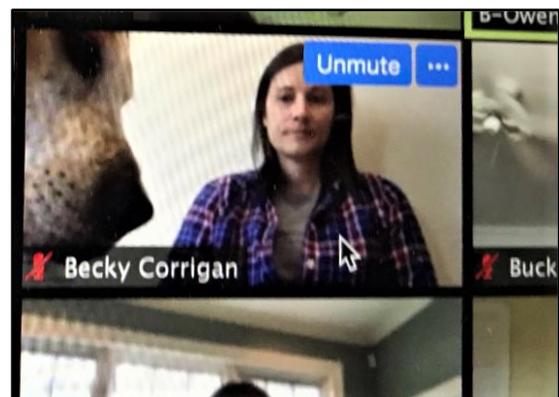
Normal school practices were no help in adapting to virtual teaching. One important area that had to be considered was grading. Becky said, “You have to have some kind of system in place. Should your grade [at that point in March] be your grade” or should the students’ work after that be considered? It was decided that a student’s grade could improve if the work merited it, but no one’s grade would be lowered.

Business as usual – mostly

On the first day of remote classes, it was “business as usual.” Becky reviewed the curriculum and explained what would remain, what would be cut and what would change. Early on, students had to accept a Zoom invitation for each class each day, but the tech staff found a way to streamline that.

In order to maintain a professional appearance, Becky wore her usual classroom attire throughout the shutdown. She said that some of the students “took a more casual approach, and apparently rolled out of bed just in time to turn on their computers. I could see lines on their faces from sleeping!”

Asked if it felt odd to have her students see part of her home and her life, Becky said, “No, everyone has a life. It made it easier for some students. They got excited when my dog came on camera. They could see that they’re not the only ones in chaos.”



With an average class size of 12 students, teachers are able to give each student a lot of one-on-one attention. Becky frequently sits with a student to help them figure out how to solve a problem. How to give personal attention while teaching remotely?

The solution was Zoom’s feature that can break a large group into small discussion groups. Becky was able to explain something to the entire class, then put them in small groups to discuss the lesson or work out a problem, and then tune in to a group to ask questions or see if they needed help.

As a science teacher to the upper grades, Becky said her biggest concern about remote teaching was how to present the hands-on lessons. The students improvised: they used whatever they could find in their homes — “everything from paper cut-outs to Legos” — to imitate bio-chemistry processes, such as cell division or photosynthesis.

The school tried to develop ways to help the students feel connected and normal. “Some students had no difficulty with virtual classes; their take was, ‘It is what it is,’” Becky said. “There were others who struggled; they missed the usual routines that they

go through to get ready for school, so they couldn't settle in comfortably. I could see others thinking, 'I need people,' or, 'This makes my head hurt.'

"There were others who thrived, who blossomed with virtual classes. I asked them why, and they said, 'We knew we had to work independently, so we read the textbook.' Now they decide to read the textbook?!"

Looking back at the last couple months of the school year, Becky said, "Everyone made the best of the situation. Overall, they were really good at remote learning. We picked up where we had been and were able to finish the curriculum. We kept the academics strong and maintained the essentials of who we are. We didn't assume: we let the kids have the feelings they had. I'm proud of how we did."

Graduation, Covid-style

Graduations at North Shore Country Day historically find the girls in white dresses and the boys in dark suits; each student walks across the stage and receives their diploma.



This year, graduation was held outside. A stage was set up in a field, and the ceremony was shown on a giant video screen and broadcast over a radio frequency. Families parked in the school's lot and stayed in their cars. Students walked across the stage at safe intervals; their diplomas were mailed to them later.

This Fall

The teachers will start preparing for in-person classes in mid-August and students will return to classes on August 31. Becky said, "We're going to see the second installation of what the new normal looks like. You know there will be kids who won't be able to

attend in person. We're going to have to design lesson plans that will allow for both in-person and remote learning.

"I'm worried about the incoming freshman class. With social distancing and other restrictions, they might not develop the bond, the sense of community, that is what our school is all about. If we have to go back to remote learning, I hope that they will have had enough time in the school to pick up on that."



"CATS 'Tall' Tales" by Jim Vahey

While Becky was teaching, Jim Vahey devoted himself to learning languages – with a tennis theme.

At the beginning of March, when I saw clearly where things were headed and the need for new hobbies, I got busy early and worked on my conversational Russian:

Какой теннисный турнир никогда не закрывается? США ОТКРЫТО.
Which tennis tournament never closes? The U.S. OPEN.

Как ты называешь девушку, стоящую посреди теннисного корта? Аннет
What do you call a girl standing in the middle of a tennis court? Annette

Почему рыба никогда не бывает хорошими теннисистами? Они не любят приближаться к сети.
Why are fish never good tennis players? They don't like getting close to the net.

See more of Jim's amazing language abilities in future issues of FWC!

Short Tails



Alan Johnson and his wife Diane both have artworks in the exhibition, ***All in the Same Boat—or Are We?*** *Artists Respond to 2020*, at Stolla Gallery, 3738 W. Irving Park Road through August 16.