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Mrs. Guerard

September 9, 2012

Elementary Education

Kindergarten:

My princess backpack was purple and sparkly. It bounced on my shoulders as I ran into school on the first day. I did not want to be late. My white keds beat the pavement in the awkward, uneven steps of a five year old. I was happy to start school. I was a big kid now. I wanted to sit at a desk and have homework like the other big kids. I wanted to learn to read.

But we did not sit at desks, we sat at tables. We did not have homework either. I did learn to read, but I did not like it. I didn't like the beginner books. They were boring. I wanted to read the *good books*, the ones my mommy read to me. But they told me I couldn't read them, I wasn't ready yet.

First Grade:

We went to school all day now. We sat at desks, we had homework every night. At first, I felt grown up and proud of my new responsibilities. But then I realized, homework was not fun, but I liked my desk. It was my own space. To keep my sparkly pencils and Hello Kitty erasers.

It was a parochial school. We went to chapel every Wednesday. Chapel was boring and I didn't like it at all. Everyday the teacher read a "devotion" with a religious message to the class. One day, the devotion said people who didn't go to church every Sunday would go to hell. *Go to hell*. I disagreed. I did not think God would let good people go to hell because they did not go to church. I asked the teacher, "Do really mean *every* Sunday." She said, yes, yes she did. I didn't like that. I decided Mrs. Burmeister was mistaken and told her so, she didn't like that much either. I sometimes even hated school that year. I was bored in class. St. John's Lutheran stifled me.

Second Grade:

I went to a new school, an independent school, a progressive school called Blue Oak School. I liked it, it smelled fresh, like new floors and clean rooms. We called our teachers by their first names. The school had just two rules: “Be safe and be kind.” If you played too rough at recess, you were not admonished or even yelled at like at St. Johns, you were just asked, “Madison, can you make a better choice?”

I felt special being the first second grade class. We stuck our hands into the freshly poured concrete to make our mark *in* the school. We stood around the garden with messy hands while the headmaster, Scott, told us we had “made our mark on the school” and that one day, we could take our children back to Blue Oak and show them our little handprints. Show them how our hands had once been just as small as theirs; a long, long time ago. I remembered where I put my hands, with the other second graders, four squares to the right of the new tree. I vowed to return one day.

Third Grade:

One day we went to restore a stream at Stags Leap Winery. The muddy earth sunk beneath my feet. But I liked restoring the stream. Planting the trees made me feel important. I understood I was helping the environment, the animals we had hurt. I told a reporter about what we were doing. I said: “The animals can’t plant their own trees, if they are losing their habitat because of us, we should help them.” I was quoted in the *Napa Register*. I felt very important. Only important people appeared in the newspaper. Now when I googled myself something about me would come up. I felt quite smug about my importance.

Fourth Grade:

Blue Oak didn’t give grades on assignments. Instead of tests we had “Show Me What You Know”s. But I still worked hard. I always did my homework and turned in my *long-term projects*. I wanted to work hard because I wanted to have the best poster, to do my best. I wouldn’t accept anything less of myself.

Fifth Grade:

The fifth graders did not graduate, we were “promoted” to middle school. I wore a green polka dotted dress to my promotion ceremony. I was excited to go to the new middle school campus. Things there would be different. We would have lockers, real tests with grades in percentages that we could convert to letter grades in our heads if we wanted. I would miss the pretty lower school with it’s vaulted ceilings and dark, hardwood floors. But I was ready to move on too. In the years of my early education I had developed a love for learning and thirst for knowledge that I would carry with me. That would propel me forward.