

So Long

Spring Park School

by Maureen Duffy Cobb

When I was young, I lived beside a magical place, with big old fields, inviting forests, monkey bars where I could go farther than my friends, and a soccer field that I would grow in and out of. I learned a lot there. On the swings one time, my friend told me all about God. "He lives in the clouds, you know," she said, "and he drives a convertible. After you die, you meet him there."

I grew up behind Spring Park School. It was a strong brick building, with its classroom windows adorned by pictures and crafts, showcasing the work of the students inside. Dreams were made, ideas were born, and generations of kids rolled in and out of its doors, singing the same songs in the music room and playing the same games in the gym. Thousands of students, teachers and staff made Spring Park School the living, breathing entity it became.

But for the kids on Newland Crescent, Spring Park School was more than the place we went to school. Our whole lives revolved around it. It wasn't just the location the bus dropped us off, or where we waited around to get picked up. It was the place we went on our days off, on weekends, and in the evenings. It contained our secret nooks, and familiar paths through its tall and welcoming birches. To us, it was where we belonged.

When my family moved to a new house in grade four, I was forced to make new friends in a different area, and I remember the longing I felt for those old, familiar school grounds. How I missed those birches! But life flows in its wonderful circles.

Last September, I grew teary-eyed when my daughter started Kindergarten at Spring Park. Like me, She got dressed for her first day of school and anxiously walked through those big gym doors for the first time. Like me, she wondered if she would meet new friends and be accepted. I had butterflies for her, holding her close the morning she left. I was sending her

off into the world; to become her own person in her class and her community; to experiment, to drift, and to belong.

I immediately signed up for the Home and School, laughing at how much I'd become my own mother.

We were off to a wonderful start, but a turbulent spring ensued; in January, Spring Park was closed due to a mould contamination, and hundreds of families were affected. Some said the school had been sick for years. Teachers, staff, and students all had reported headaches, dizziness, and other symptoms of the growing bacteria. It was serious.

At first, most of us thought the school might be closed for a month or so, but the problem turned out to be much more devastating. The mould was in the walls, and possibly all of them. It was a trying time for the hundreds involved, but in June 2011, the Eastern School District finally announced that a new school would be built, and that the old one would be demolished. My school. My memories. My history.

It never really fazed Lei, our daughter, but

I admit, when those hard-hat boys came in with their machines and starting knocking that old girl down, I felt a piece of me was gone forever. I grieved with a girlfriend who felt the district should have hosted an Open House and invited all former graduates, teachers and staff – a going away party of sorts. We could have toasted her triumphs, and sent her off and into the next life.

Which brings me to the real silver lining here: Spring Park isn't gone, she's just transforming. She will again become that brave face with the quiet smile that will welcome new generations for years to come.

My dad, a philosopher and a scholar, was heavily influenced by the writing of Thomas Merton, and always talked to my brothers and me about the transmigration of souls, though we never had a clue what he meant. But when we live long enough we see that while things truly change, they remain the same, so the transmigration of souls (and schools) is the metaphor most appealing to me in all of this. Spring Park has done something that humans often dream of: she's cashed in her old bones for a brand, new body; one that will take care of her students for years to come.

So here's to our old girl: let's hope she has a safe passage.

