

Memories of School by Emery Kleven were written for the WCHS newsletter in 2021.

To quote comedian Steven Wright; ‘Whenever I think about the past, it brings up so many memories.’ That line is so true when thinking about our grade school and high school days. We all have our own memories of school days, many of which are shared with friends and classmates. The building, that was either a high school or grade school or both to some, conjures up memories to me every time I walk into it. I’ve written about or talked about a lot of those memories to so many people. My class of 1971 was the first class to have kindergarten when it was a grade school only. 1959 was the first year of the new school where my sister Karolyn was in the first graduating class there, the same year I graduated kindergarten.



The ‘old’ school in West Concord



This is the picture Mrs. Osborn gave to each kindergarten student in 1959. You’ll notice my cursive writing of Mrs. Osborn’s name on the picture.

The old assembly room above the gymnasium is where Mrs. Betty Osborn taught a morning class and an afternoon class of about 30 kids each for 6 weeks in the spring of 1959. It’s funny how I can walk into that room and show you the very spot where a little pile of sand was laying on the floor outside the sandbox that we had in there. We were all in our chairs when Mrs. Osborn asked who did that. I knew but I was sworn to secrecy. I think we all learned about that secrecy thing on day one. And even today I won’t rat out who did it. We weren’t banned from the sand but were told in no uncertain terms to not do it again.

In third grade we were out for noon recess on the playground in the spring of 1962. You may recall how big icicles would hang from the edge of the roof from the melting snow. Well two teachers, Mrs. Marian Moreland and Mrs. Charlotte Roberts were on recess duty that particular day. It was a somewhat mild day and the snow on the roof was warming up. Again I can show you the exact spot I was standing when I happened to look up at the giant stalactites when suddenly one of them broke loose and started to fall. The two teachers were standing in its path. The icicle turned a little so the point of it was not coming straight down. The bigger part of it though hit Mrs. Moreland on the head and shoulder and she went down. It could have been much worse but she did suffer a concussion from it but otherwise came through it okay.

My 4th grade teacher was Mrs. Elizabeth Stukel. She was in the first of two years of teaching in WC. After our class I'm surprised she lasted a second year. Among our exploits was the many times I along with accomplices Joel Sackett, Grant Ness, Merlin Moreland and Jim Monical would run down to the basement boy's lavatory when school was over for the day to climb out the little basement window. We did that several times and all was good until one day, one of our girl classmates told Mrs. Stukel that 5 boys were climbing out the basement window. So we were marched into our classroom which was upstairs on the west side and is today the fashion room. Well we got an 'old fashioned' talking to and we had to stay after school which led to more being 'talked to' at home. I was down in the bowels of the museum a couple of years ago and walked in the old boy's lavatory. The urinals which we climbed up on to reach the window are now gone. And the window is gone as well so as to keep me from reliving my past by climbing out for old times' sake. It's just as well as I'd get stuck if I tried that today.

In the fall of 1963, surprisingly I was advanced to 5th grade. My teacher this year was Mrs. Nina Noser. She was one of my favorite teachers when I think back to those school years but she kept discipline in her classroom anyway she needed to. Sometimes that would involve a little hair pulling or ear pulling. On this particular November day, two of my aforementioned accomplices had their ears pulled because they did not come in during the noon recess for a previous infraction. She got their attention by yanking on their left ear and asking why they were not in their desk during recess. Our classroom was on the upper floor on the southeast corner of the grade school. There is a door between the two rooms on the south. After the ear stretching exercise, we hear the other half of our class of 71, being taught by Mrs. Delzer, listening to the radio. At first we were jealous that they got to listen to the radio but then suddenly that door swung open and the radio was turned up a little more and we realize that they had the news of the JFK shooting. That's a moment in time that we all remember where we were.

This brings me to the point that while most of our school memories are good and not shocking like that November, 1963 day, we can go back and physically be where we were back then. I took my son through the museum several years ago and I showed him all these spots like where the window was we climbed out, where the pile of sand was in kindergarten and where I was sitting the day I heard the news of President Kennedy.

The picture below of a sidewalk to nowhere illustrates that Kenyon students have the memories but they can't go back into that very room or walk on the wooden floors or go see where someone autographed the wall in the attic back in 1935. The sidewalk, once filled with students going to or home from the school building that sat on that very lot is all that's left of the old Kenyon school. I am so thankful for the community leaders of West Concord that saved the school house of 1902 so we can still walk through it today. And as of January, 2021, the

venerable old building with its 1914 addition and the 1936 addition of the gym and other rooms are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



The sidewalk that used to lead to the Kenyon school building is all that's left

It has taken countless hours of volunteers first to save the building, then transform it to a museum and to do a lot of maintenance work to keep it in good repair. Those many hours of volunteer work continue today. And I thank you for your generous donations through the years to help keep the memories alive. I've talked to some Kenyon graduates who would love the opportunity to walk again through their old school but they won't get that chance. They can walk down one of the old sidewalks but that's where it ends. If you went to the school in what is now the West Concord Historical Society museum, you can still come back and walk down memory lane one more time. I know my heartfelt thanks goes out to those many volunteers and community leaders of years ago who have made it possible for me. Thank you for your continued financial support of the West Concord Historical Society.