

The Remarkable Influence of the School in Rose Valley

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The remarkable influence of the School in Rose Valley (SRV) has been woven like a thread through my lifetime. Over forty years after completing 6th grade I continue to appreciate its formative impact on every aspect of my life, including all of my professional and personal success.

I attended SRV from 1963 until 1972. In addition to foundational learning (e.g. reading, writing, and arithmetic), the dimensions of creativity, activity, citizenship and problem-solving were all essential aspects of learning at SRV. Each of these dimensions had a profound and lifelong impact on my ongoing development.

My lifelong sense of physical “agency” was fostered through athletics, dance, wood shop, and play and adventure in the woods at SRV. The approach to these activities was gender-inclusive; I was encouraged equally along with my male peers. This dimension of physical development led to a lifelong love of movement, and confidence in what can be accomplished through physical activity. I played soccer, often in co-ed teams, in high school, college, and recreational leagues until I was 40, and I continue to participate in dance activities to this day. I have worked on maintenance crews and on farms, drawing on the foundation of kinesthetic problem-solving I learned in outdoor play and in wood shop. My lifelong love of and comfort in nature is enriched by my memories of SRV: early morning bird watching and cooking breakfast on an open fire, hiking and camping trips, caring for the sheep and goats, and the special bond I had with a dogwood tree, which I was assigned in first grade to observe and write reports on as it was growing and changing through the seasons.

I see citizenship and problem solving as interlocking influences from SRV. The individualized attention, small class size, and open-classroom method create a context in which each student is actively engaged with their own learning. These early experiences of being heard, and being expected to speak, formed a lifelong sense of personal agency. I have always felt that my voice mattered **and** that it was my responsibility to use my voice thoughtfully and with integrity. This means listening closely, critically considering variables, and actively engaging in the intersection of personal and collective possibility and responsibility. I was fortunate to move from SRV to educational environments that built on these assumptions – that we are all active citizens in creating knowledge and problem-solving. To this day I assume my view, as long as it is carefully considered and responsibly delivered, has merit, whether I am addressing peers, elected representatives, or leaders of state or national organizations. Colleagues remark that they value my thoughtful contributions to dialogue, which often synthesize apparently divergent ideas into cohesive themes, advancing a group’s capacity for problem-solving.

Another product of citizenship and problem-solving at SRV is intellectual accountability. I have always understood that I am responsible for the rigor of the knowledge I gain and convey to others. My fifth grade research paper on golden retrievers helped to set the stage for decades of successful writing, specifically the process of articulating a thesis. I thank SRV for this early approach to intellectual rigor, further honed in higher education, which has translated into many years of professional accomplishment, including a graduate degree, successful grant writing, program development, responsibility for teaching graduate students, and my emerging role as a peer reviewer of academic scholarship.

One of the most common legacies of an SRV education must be a life-long appreciation of music. In the decades since SRV I have remained actively involved in music and dance, as a singer, musician, dancer, performer and occasional teacher. It is always fun when a curious friend or colleague asks how I became involved in these traditions. Unlike many who developed long-term musical interests during adolescence or early adult-hood, my answer is: "I started when I was three years old." SRV's exposure to creative and traditional arts is exceptional. Building on nine years of singing and dancing at SRV I have not only continued to be involved with folk traditions, but pursued formal vocal study in high school, completed a major in voice in college, worked for many years in arts administration, and currently perform in a classical choir. Perhaps this range of interests and proficiencies speaks to SRV's influence as well, as I have been intrigued to explore many types of music, and engage and develop proficiency in styles ranging from folk to jazz to classical.

Throughout my lifespan, and across the spectrum from vocation to avocation, SRV's influence and assumptions have been constant companions. Perhaps the best way to describe this impact is that my SRV education encourages me to hold many expectations and possibilities simultaneously: that there is space for my contributions; that I step into that space and actively contribute in a thoughtful way; and that blending material, physical, natural, creative, and aesthetic orientations is a pathway to problem-solving that enriches an individual's understanding and experience, and makes a positive contribution to our collective society.