

The following letters are from staff, parents, and students who were at one of the three Laurel stages, but these came in during the writing of the book.

Ahead of Our Time

Abbie Schnorr
Teacher 1972-2009

So many memories. Here are a few comments on specific programs in the original Laurel building.

Laurel had the migrant program before the bilingual came into existence. We first used the annex building to the west of the playground, and, when we moved to the trailers [i.e. modular buildings on Locust St.] we took the program with us. Jim Thurston was our original teacher and did an excellent job with our Laurel kids. I even helped get busses to go into the countryside and pick up kids in the summer as we also ran a summer program.

Laurel also had the only woodworking shop/classroom in the Poudre School District. Dean Reiner, the head of industrial arts helped me start the program, and I ran it out of our boiler room with hand tools and wood that I found with Dean in dumpsters around the town. Moving into the trailers stopped the program as none of the tools survived the move. They somehow were appropriated by movers and never made it over.

IGE was major at Laurel and was also being used at Riffenburg and Beattie schools. Harris was never a part, so, only 4-6 grades were impacted. This program necessitated that school only meet for half a day on Friday so we could conduct parent conferences, planning, and, constantly upgrade testing results. Report cards were different from the rest of the district as we only had written comments. Very labor intensive, but, the best reporting I ever had the privilege to use.

We had 4,5, and 6 all together in one class, but, one teacher taught the math, science, social studies, while the other taught reading, writing and all English requirements. So, my first year, I had 39 in the morning, then a different group in the afternoon. Amazing, but, wonderful.

It was a fantastic group of teachers, but, we had the town's best students!!

A Family Affair

Amelia (Valdez) Martinez - 1990s

I attended Laurel Elementary in the 90s and graduated H.S. in the spring of 2000. My mom also attended Laurel, from 1969 until 1974. The cool thing is that we both had Mr. Hill as our P.E. teacher, Mrs. Courtney for music and Mrs. Lebsack was a para for us both as well.

My son Aiden Valdez-Martinez just graduated in May 2018 and Mrs. Lebsack was a para during his Laurel time as well, Mrs. Tamez was also at Laurel during both mine and Aiden's time at Laurel, and we both had the privilege of knowing Mrs. Harris while at Laurel. Besides my mom, myself and my son, my sister, and two of my cousins have also attended Laurel.

My son remembers the fall Halloween festival. He always looked forward to it every year. I remember the giant field days we used to have all around the school, earning ribbons and playing all day (Also the snake in your classroom, Mr. Castro).

My mom was at Laurel when they moved from the Laurel/Peterson location to the new building, She remembers walking from the old Laurel to the new Laurel with their supplies in bags and being in the first classes at the new location.

A Magical Place!

Ashley Waddell
6th-grade graduating class of 1989 :-)

It made me so happy to learn that this book was being written, because Laurel Elementary was an incredibly special place and community for me.

Harris-Laurel was my elementary-school experience, starting when I entered one of Harris' kindergarten classrooms in the fall of 1982, and culminating when I graduated from sixth grade and left Laurel's doors for the last time. Even back then, I knew our school-family was special. We spoke both Spanish and English in class, came from a broad range of

economic and geographic backgrounds, and celebrated the rich diversity of perspectives that those differences brought to our community.

I love that all of us who attended Laurel Elementary had the good fortune to grow up in a school where diversity was something we didn't even think about -- it was just who we were. As a kid, I took for granted that my friends Jared, Diana, and Lupe spoke Spanish at home, and that when I played at their houses after school, their parents didn't speak any English. It didn't strike me as unusual at all that my friend Thanh's parents had come from Vietnam, or that when another of our classmates visited his grandparents, he'd go to a Native American reservation. We were all just friends.

That diversity extended beyond cultural differences, too. Mom was a full-time graduate student, Dad had just finished grad school and started his career, and money was always tight. I was one of the kids who qualified for free school lunch, but I don't recall that being anything remarkable at the time, or any reason to feel embarrassed. Somehow, the teachers managed to deliver engaging lessons, including multi-disciplinary hands-on projects, without our parents having to contribute supplemental funds or provide expensive supplies.

And what projects they were! Laurel Elementary faculty members were developing multi-subject multi-week lessons that enriched our learning long before "teaching across the curriculum" was the overused jargon-y phrase it has become today. One project I remember well taught us about how the economy works. Each student picked a publicly-traded company to represent, and over the course of a few weeks we used the local newspaper to follow the rise and fall of that company's stock price. We could buy and sell stock with each other, and tracked our profits and losses on graph paper each day. We talked about what might be influencing various companies' fortunes -- weather? politics? consumer demand? -- and what actions companies might take to mitigate them.

It's astounding to me that my teachers managed to deliver lessons like these, that involved the entire class, knowing that there were English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and a whole range of levels of mastery in each classroom. Teachers were tailoring the curriculum with each of our individual abilities in mind, but that wasn't something I

remember being aware of; every day I was presented with new challenges at school, new puzzles to figure out, new things to learn about the world.

The teachers also surprised us in ways that made Laurel seem like an absolutely magical place, where anything could happen... and sometimes did! One Halloween, the teachers all dressed up as characters from the television show "M*A*S*H." A huge camouflage Army tent was erected inside the gymnasium, and truly, to step inside was to be transported to another continent in another era. That they pulled off this huge transformation together also showed what a successful team our teachers were; we always had the sense that they weren't just colleagues, but friends as well.

I started fourth grade at Laurel in the fall of 1986, and it was not an easy time for our family. My maternal grandmother was dying of cancer, which led me to miss quite a bit of school as we drove across the mountains as frequently as we could to spend time with her in the Western Slope home she loved so much. She passed away around Christmas that year, and although I'm sure it caused them to have a heavier workload for those four months, my teachers never complained when I asked for my assignments ahead of time, or needed an extra tutorial session to catch up after returning from another trip. My mom still remembers how comforting the Laurel community was during my grandmother's illness and after, as we grieved her loss. Laurel was just an extension of our family, and everyone did all they could to help us at that difficult time.

I call Laurel a family, and in my memories, two people tied that family together more than anyone else: Mrs. Courtney and Mr. Hill. Teaching music and P.E. respectively, the two of them were among the first people we met as we started kindergarten at Harris, and they continued as our teachers all the way through the end of sixth grade at Laurel. Other teachers were ours for a year at a time, but these two helped us grow over seven years in a row! Theirs were the most fun classes, and also the ones that left the most lasting impact.

Music class with Mrs. Courtney meant singing, dancing, playing instruments, and -- perhaps most important of all -- learning to be comfortable in your own skin. We did all kinds of music-making,

improvisation exercises and silly dances that at the time felt like risking humiliation in front of our peers. But Mrs. Courtney's warm acceptance of all of us, for exactly who we were, led us in turn to embrace one another. That so many of us benefited from her exuberant wisdom from kindergarten through sixth grade helped us to build strong foundations within ourselves, even when times were tough for one reason or another. Mrs. Courtney also led Laurel's choir (which was among the best in the state) and to this day, even after winning prestigious fellowships and admission into highly selective colleges, I'm not sure I've ever been more thrilled by an acceptance letter than the day I opened that envelope and learned I was a Laurel Elementary chorister.

I give Mr. Hill, our P.E. teacher, a lot of credit for instilling a lifelong love of exercise in me and my classmates. It was common back then for kids to be punished for misbehaving by being made to run laps, but Mr. Hill *loved* to run, and wanted us to love it, too. Each class began with a warm-up run around the school grounds, and as we ran, he would point out birds and flowers, and sometimes interject variety into the routine. "Today, let's run the second half of the lap backwards!" "Today, let's run the whole lap just listening -- no words." We'd return to the gym, faces glowing, endorphins flowing, joyful in part because running filled *him* with so much joy. "Don't you feel just GREAT?!" he would exclaim. I've never been a fast runner, but running has always been a source of happiness for me, in part because of Mr. Hill. In 2011 when I completed a tough, 100-mile trail race, he was often on my mind. I know I'm not the only one who became a lifelong runner, thanks to his merry example.

Speaking of active living, intramural sports teams were one of the key community-building programs at Laurel. Mr. Ogan and Mr. Sadowski led seasonal sports leagues that were so encouraging and fun that even uncoordinated people like me felt welcome! Whether it was flag football, basketball, or softball season, most students participated and got to experience the camaraderie of a sports team, and even improve our skills along the way! This too helped build friendships and trust across the student body, and let us get to know students outside of the classroom.

We live at a time when diversity is widely touted as a good thing, but rarely *experienced*. Though segregation is no longer the law of the land,

economic disparities and broadening income inequalities have led to less and less diverse school communities. I hope that as more people learn about the vibrant, diverse community that is Laurel Elementary, there will be greater enthusiasm for embracing the richness of experiences that these communities provide to their members.

Thank you, Mr. Castro, for taking the time to celebrate this unique learning environment. Never before or since have I been a part of a community quite like Laurel!

Crow Canyon
Betty Ellis Loffer
Teacher 1981-2003

This all began in the summer of 1989. I was making my annual visit to Durango, Colorado, the home of my parents and my birth place. I was teaching the fourth grade at the time and Colorado history was a requirement. The first unit covered the southwestern corner of the state and the home of the Anasazi. My grandfather was quite an amateur archaeologist and taken me to many of the important sites around our neighboring town of Cortez.

The Crow Canyon Archaeological Center had just opened up there. It was set up to be a long term research program for archaeologists and students researching the prehistoric culture of people living there over 2,000 years ago.

I visited the Center the next week. I was very impressed with the program they developed for the students. It was designed to be a total student immersion program. The students stayed for 4 days and participated in many hands on activities and field trips to museums and Mesa Verde National Park.

While I was there, two big buses pulled up from Detroit, Michigan and 20 young men and women came off. Curious as I am, I took a moment to talk to the adult that was present. Most certainly, it was a class.

At that moment, it occurred to me, that if students could come that distance why couldn't students from Laurel Elementary come across the state? I knew this was an opportunity for our students to experience a learning program they would never forget.

The next few months were spent selling this program to the administration. I worked with many outstanding educators in the Poudre School District. Staff members of Laurel supported my proposal. Eileen Lebsack volunteered to accompany me. Parents were excited and ready to sign their kids up.

Late June of 1990 found Eileen and I each driving a school van across Colorado with 11 students, 4 tents, 13 sleeping bags, and provisions needed for 2 overnights on the road, bound for Crow Canyon Archaeological Center!

We would spent 3 nights at the center. Two nights exploring Mesa Verde and the Ute Indian museum at Montrose. This was a dream come true and all expectations for the student learning experience were exceeded!

Student participants - Aaron Wolf, Nathan Zeiler, Nazareth Dionne, Mike Arndt(? we think) Micheal Spaulding, Rebecca Upham, Julianne Wirshborn, Lenee Gross, Ann Hayward, Jake Lauer, and David Yates. [I'm not sure the spelling is 100% correct]

Mother and Daughter

Brandi Harris Molin

I went to Harris-Laurel. I started in kindergarten at Harris in 1979 and graduated 6th grade from Laurel in 1986. I guess it was kind of a family tradition. Both of my parents went to Harris for at least one year and my mom even went to the old, OLD Laurel. It is only fitting that she would end up being at Harris and Laurel for 37 years as a classified employee.

Karen Harris started as the secretary at Harris when I was in second grade and ended her career at Laurel, working with the teachers and students. She loved Eco-Week and Field Day and Laps for Laurel – the outdoor activities. She also loved the dogs at parent drop-off and pick-up.

My favorite times at Laurel were also the outside activities which mostly involved the way the building and property were before Harris and Laurel combined in to the same building – playing at the Annie-Annie Over wall, the field behind the wall where we had the Rendezvous re-enactments and did field day events, the softball field where we played against the teachers, the flag football field where we had a very intense season each year and the nature center where you felt you could escape from it all, and of course Eco-Week at Pingree Park.

I loved, LOVED elementary school – everything about it. Laurel was the perfect fit for my outside-loving, athletic, tom-boy side as well as my academic side with the math Olympiad team, Mrs. Streeter's gifted and talented group, the science fair, dissecting chinchillas, and so much more. It was truly an exceptional place for me and my willingness to learn.

I had the pleasure of going to Eco-Week as an adult volunteer several years ago. My mom had broken her toe so I went so that there was another adult for the hike. It was wonderful to experience that with her and even though it was in a different place than I had gone (Estes Park YMCA), it still brought back so many memories.

Beyond the Walls

Brandon Kirby

Laurel 1981-1986

It is difficult to sum up the entirety of the superior Laurel experience in just one story, and had to write wider to try and capture the spirit of Laurel in the 1980's. I think so warmly of so many people, faces, names, and places that it would resemble the Book of Numbers in just listing those from Laurel who have greatly impacted me.

I had the privilege and honor of knowing Laurel when she was in her spry 70's; while I am confident the fair school has only gotten finer with age. The full novel of Laurel is literally comprised of tens of thousands of stories of the lives it has shaped, touched, molded, and impacted. Laurel's teachers and staff were comprehensively devoted to developing the full humanity of students for a lifetime; well beyond the elementary school walls. The lessons in the classroom solidly taught us the 3 R's in English and Spanish, in step with what was going on in the world around us with the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion, rise of environmental awareness, and the wide impact of the introduction of the personal computer at Laurel. The janitorial staff, librarians, bus drivers, and administration abundantly delighted in being a part of successes, trials, and teachable moments within the pillars of the ABCD Code that remains pertinent today. The lunch hour was filled overflowing with near universal participation in football and softball leagues where everyone had a place, a position, a pat on the back, and a positive experience. Laurel after school continued to build character and community with scouting, math and science competitions, youth sports teams, chili suppers, PTA meetings, carnivals, and cultural celebrations. Through it all, Laurel developed us into citizens with civility, character, and confidence.

I can only hope that many, many more get to be positively influenced by Laurel for another one hundred and eleven plus; outliving us all and carrying small parts of each of us with its legacy.

Good to hear from you,

Staff Memories!

These memories transcribed from a staff party conversation at Margaret Chapman's home with former staff members in the spring of 2019.

Participants:

Karen Courtney 1973 to 1994

Margaret Chapman 1997-2009 (K and 5th)

Mary Teets 1981-2006 (K and 5th)

Sally Rodgers 1968-1990 at Harris

Karen Streeter: Harris Elementary (5th grade, 21 years old), back 1969 at the old Laurel, 1975 to 1988 in the NEW Laurel (modular).

Sherry Workman 1990-2001 Principal

Karen Courtney

Paul Young, who is also Russell Crowe's agent, and a Laurel graduate came to my retirement. Kelly, my accompanist, contacted him. I don't know how. But he and his wife, Cheryl, did come. He sang, "It's still rock n roll to me," the song he performed in 5th grade, along with all the moves. He had written me a letter where he told me that he had gone down the wrong road, but that music saved him. He was talented. Of course, I was in tears reading the letter. So he came and sang with the choir. It was amazing.

Karen spoke of the camaraderie among staff in the 80s. Speaking of Karen Streeter, 6th grade teacher but also the choir accompanist doing Great Balls of Fire as part of a choir performance, playing part of it with her butt!

Sally Rodgers

Alex Colby was doing short commercial films for Gucci and others. His sister, Mia, got a Masters in Public Health at Tufts.

Nick Vaughn is in NY doing stage design.

Mary Teets and Margaret Chapman: Journey into Government program

It started in 2004. It was actually parent driven. Laurie Rogers and Susan Hill applied for one grant. Mel Fernandez wrote a fabulous grant to The Bohemian Foundation. The program included visiting city government meetings as well as the state legislature. Met with local/state officials Ray Martinez and Bob Bacon. We met all year on Mondays after school. We were granted \$27,000 to fund 17 kids for the whole experience, an experience that involved a trip to Washington D.C.!

In the second year, Margaret took over. We got \$8000 but to receive the money support, the kids had to be free/reduced lunch. No one signed up in that category. Half the number that year were kids and half were parents.

It was done every other year so as to alternate with Crow Canyon.

It fit perfectly into the curriculum since 5th grade studies American History.

I [Margaret] remember one little boy at the Lincoln Memorial looking at this huge guy sitting on a year, and in awe he was spinning around, overwhelmed by the sight.

Many of those kids had never been on a plane.

Sherry Workman

I said earlier that there's not much I can share due to confidentiality [Principal]. But one thing that sticks in my mind is the caring and nurturing environment at the school. I picked up on it in my first visit.

Sally Rodgers

I travelled between Laurel [original Laurel] - 4-6 - and Harris (K-3). In 1974 I got married and left the district. Richard [Sadowske] came in and when I

returned Richard stayed at Laurel, and I went to Harris. I was one of the first counselors in the city.

Staffs had separate meetings [due to having two buildings] but the unity was not an issue. Kids looked forward to going to Laurel.

The woodwork at the original Laurel was amazing. Everything creaked. I don't know where she [music teacher] held music as all was so noisy.

At old Laurel we did eco-week, before the district did it. We did all the prep and cooking and cleaning and went to a Girl Scout camp in Allenspark. No staff there, just Laurel. I have never been so exhausted. The district had not sanctioned it. Shortly after, the district came onboard, and we didn't have to take our own food and so on.

Sherry Workman

On bringing the staff together after Laurel and Harris became one...

We had a whole day as one staff. It was about taking down the walls and barriers. We did activities together. A primary teacher thought she could not go to intermediate wing. Not safe. What do you mean? I asked. I spoke to the separateness of the two schools and the need to come together. I called the activities short and allowed all to go to their rooms to work. Right away five people came to meet with me; long overdue sessions!

I thought it as one of the campuses was more left brained and the other was more right brained. Primary was left brained. Intermediate was more right brained.

Picking name of the mascot at the new building in 1993: Laurel Nature Club was involved.

End of some of the memories shared at the party.

Mayor Hutchinson
Doug Hutchinson

My family came to Fort Collins in 1946, when I was four years old. I attended Kindergarten at Laurel 1947-48, and First Grade the following year.

My wife of 42 years, Cathy (McKellar) Hutchinson, was in that same Kindergarten class. In fact, in our kindergarten class photograph, we are actually standing next to each other!

I grew up in Fort Collins, graduated from Fort Collins High School in 1960, got married in the middle of getting a degree at CSU and entered the US Air Force in 1966. After 33 years of living in different parts of the world, I retired, and Cathy and I returned to Fort Collins in 1999. In fact, we moved into her family home on Whedbee Street (where she was living when she attended Kindergarten etc.) a home filled with memories.

After settling into our retirement, we got concerned about Fort Collins and got into politics. I was elected mayor of Fort Collins in April 2005.

Laurel is home

Walking into Laurel in August 2006 felt like something special.
Walking into Laurel in March 2019 feels like home.

Emily Anderson
teacher, 2006-present

To the 2056 Students & Staff of Laurel Elementary
Esther Wilcox, Ph.D., Class of 1989

I'd like to share with you a bit of history and a few of my memories from when I went to Laurel Elementary way back in the 1980's.

Back then, the school actually consisted of two different buildings. There was Harris for the kindergarten through third grade. Harris still stands today at the corner of Elizabeth and Smith streets and is a bilingual school. The third-grade class would graduate from Harris and continue on to Laurel for fourth through sixth grade. Together they were known as Harris-Laurel Elementary and the mascots were the Longhorns.

When Laurel moved to Locust Court, it was a temporary building made out of modular pieces. The one permanent structure was the gym/cafeteria. To make the space multi-purpose, the tables were in the wall, and were folded down for lunch. Most of it was in a strange light green color, that for some unknown reason my friends and I all referred to as "monkey puke green." In order to add a bit of light to the room, a mural was painted on the north wall. It was of two longhorns with the words "Harris-Laurel Longhorns" on the top.

Some of my fondest memories at Laurel took place in the gym. I always enjoyed hanging out with my friends at lunch. We'd always see what kind of things we got in our lunches and trade with each other. All of the school assemblies also took place there. I distinctly remember a scientist from Colorado State University coming to talk to us. He did demonstrations with liquid nitrogen, such as putting an inflated balloon in it, which reduces the size. He also froze a rubber band and shattered it on the floor. Along the lines of science, the science fair was also held in the gym. The beginnings of my love for science came from Laurel.

In the early 1990's the temporary structure was taken down to make way for the new permanent building, which I hope is still standing when you read this. After the old building was demolished, my best friend, who I got to know at Harris-Laurel, and I decided to take a look around the rubble. We came across a section which used to be the north wall of the gym/

cafeteria. I found this piece of brick from the mural and decided to take it as a memento. I'm sure that it is a piece of one of the longhorns.

I'm honored to give this piece of history back to Laurel during this 100 year celebration.

Mrs. Traut remembers Laurel and Harris

Evelyn Traut, for whom (along with her sister) Traut Core Knowledge Elementary is named in Fort Collins reminisced about her time at Harris-Laurel while interviewed by Judy Castro. She is 94 years old as of this writing.

She started teaching in 1948 and retired in 1990. While at Remington, Harris-Laurel, Barton and Putnam she taught grades one and three. For ten years she taught the federal reading program, Title 1, while traveling between schools.

She enjoyed her years there at Harris-Laurel. Her sister taught at Harris for a while as well. This was the beginning of Evelyn's teaching career in Ft. Collins. There were a lot of Hispanic families in the early years, with students moving a lot and having limited educational experience.

Things were strict back in those days. You had to be on time and follow the rules. Not much parent interaction with teachers. Things always improved through the years. There was not much offered in the way of Music, Art or PE instruction. They were the consultants and told the classroom teachers what to do. They would come in and be sure the classroom teachers taught them correctly.

She loved the music programs that Anna Tavelli put on in the early years. Evelyn enjoyed working on those programs, with each teacher putting on their programs such as at Christmas. They taught their own songs too. At the old Laurel, where she taught during the 1948-49 school year, she remembered how the kids would stand on the steps of the huge staircase in the building while Mrs. Tavelli would lead from the bottom of the stairs.

The parents were seated or standing around the entry way, She enjoyed everything about Harris-Laurel. She learned so much from the kids.

Things have improved over the years. Some of the big changes: parents became more interested in education of their kids, teaching methods, kids learned English better so could communicate. A lot of kids couldn't speak any English for so many years. At some point they decided not to use Phonics any more: eliminated it. Evelyn was not in favor of that, but it was decided to eliminated anyway. This did not last too long.

Teachers worked very hard for quite a bit less pay and didn't complain like teachers do now. Teachers did the best they knew how with what they had. The first computers teachers had just landed on their desks with a manual on how to set it up themselves. It was a huge box: close to three feet high! No tech support!

A Music Teacher Remembers

Karen Courtney

On the staff's Lemming Ritual: We all wrote "stuff that we wanted to 'let go'" after the year was over and then lined up and threw them into a water-filled fishbowl. No one knew what each wrote, because they were all disposed of (I don't really remember how). [We would all dance around the bowl as in some sort of ancient ritual with Ogie and Sid leading the way with chains that symbolized the breaking of old and unwanted memories].

The specials unit was very supportive of each other. My husband built and put together the backdrop frames. Art teachers either supervised students painting backdrops (or did them herself if time was lacking). Bud [PE teacher] handled the stage crew (and rigged phones to ring!). In return, we helped Bud set up his Field Days early on those mornings they occurred. We helped Judy, Caylor, Carly [some of the art teachers at Laurel] hang art for District Art Shows. A healthy respect for each other's professions! Classroom teachers often pitched in (besides helping with discipline and riding motorcycles in as part of a 50's program).

Singing songs around the campfire and square and line dancing for Eco Week were some great times also! We "specials" really appreciated getting to know those 6th graders in a different way (most of the time...)

Reflections of Laurel School 1976-1988 by Karen Streeter

PEOPLE

A rich diversity of multi-talented, eager students grades 4-6

A compassionate, dedicated and fun staff (Halloween celebrations: Mash and California Grapevine)

Supportive and concerned parents

Administrators Keith Johnson, Luisa Vigil, Sherry Ritch

PROGRAMS

Bilingual Program (Laurel Walton, Ed Castro)

Annual Eco-Week trip to Pingree Park (6th graders and staff)

All-school Sports Program (Richard Sadowski, Jim Ogan, Bud Hill)

DISCOVERY Gifted program 1982-1988 (Karen Streeter, staff, parents, community)

Four areas recognized:

***Intellectual:** Math Olympiads, Science Fair (Jan Fair Nesheim), News Bowl, Great Books (Donna Reidhead) International Day (CSU foreign students and parents), Assemblies including Peter Pellgreen Channel 7 helicopter pilot, Skippets Jump Ropers, Cinco de Mayo

***Creativity:** Olympics of the Mind CPS, *Goofy Gadgets* contest, Day of the Arts (CSU, Laurel parents and community), Grant guests: (1) Pablo Neruda Poetry (Cynthia Tremblay), (2) Storytelling, (3) Body Language (Mime C.W. Metcalf), Video pen pals with New York School (Superbowl year for Broncos and Giants)

***Talented:** Expression of Laurel Choir (Karen Courtney and Karen Streeter),

Laurel Radio Show (Jan Nesheim and Ed Castro), Annual Talent Show (Karen Courtney), Enrichment Classes (staff and community), Nursing home projects (Interviews) and holiday concerts

***Leadership:** Student Council, Student of the Month, Mock Elections, Career Day (community)

PERFORMANCE

Laurel Choir Performances at Colorado Music Educators Association state conferences

Rafa Sandoval Artwork published in Contact Magazine 1982

James DeWitt honored as Colorado Fourth Congressional Outstanding Volunteer 1983

Eileen Lebsack and Helen Woodard Outstanding Volunteers

PROMISE

Every person who lived and grew in the Laurel School Family enriched his/her life with the educational experiences and genuine care offered there. It is the hope that the promise of these individuals brightened and benefitted the world around them.

Dear Friends and Family of Laurel School,

*Thank you for the rich and rewarding opportunity to enjoy so many **GE** (Growth Experiences) moments with you. My mind is filled with fabulous memories and my heart is flooded with grateful emotion.*

The students claim my attention and accolades first because they were the teachers for me. They opened the world in so many ways and broadened my knowledge and understanding. I am a better person because of their involvement in my life.

*The teachers, administrators and all exceptional 'helper-bees' were my cherished colleagues and caring cohorts. We all cared about kids and put kids **FIRST!** Let's continue that priority today.*

The community supported and sustained us through our challenges and celebrations. Laurel was always a WE team! How I appreciate being a part of that team!

A Generational School
Laura Marasco Walton

I started at the old Laurel in 1950, but as for teaching, I began in 1975 and ended in 1986. One year off in 1978 when we moved temporarily to Oregon for Steve to go to OSU.

I have so many wonderful memories at Laurel I wouldn't know where to begin. I guess the significance of the deep friendships we all made with each other and our families stands out as important. Also the fact that three of my four children went there, three of my grandchildren attended, Steve plumbed the new building, my mother and I went to the old Laurel, and I taught summer school in the old Laurel, make it a generational school anchor in our family's educational history.

Nature at Laurel
Peg McLaughlin
Teacher 1960's & 1970's

I taught at Remington School and moved to Laurel with the intermediate grades. Keith Johnston was the principal and Bernie Long was the assistant principal.

When the new Laurel was built, my students really liked the big playground! We used to watch a little muskrat playing by the spring near the parking lot.

It was unusual for a muskrat to be living near a school, but it must have been attracted to the water in the spring.

I remember the cottonwood trees, especially the one near the soccer field in the eastern part of the playground. Someone had put some extra cement near the tree, and the tree seemed to be dying. We removed the cement and dug a ditch all around the tree. My class worked hard keeping the ditch full of water until the tree started to recover. We also enjoyed working in the Nature Center. Jack, our janitor did much of the planting and caring. When we first started, most of the plants were so small you could hardly identify them. There were a few elm trees near the east and south boundaries that were more than a few feet tall. My class pulled weeds, studied the different life zones, cleared the paths, and redid the walkways.

They Walked with me

Roberta Spieker, staff

Laurel Elementary will always have a fond place in my heart and in the life of our family.

We first came to Laurel as a "New to Fort Collins, homeschool family". After an unexpected turn of events, we ended up, on a Sunday afternoon in August, walking the grounds of Laurel Elementary with the knowledge our girls would have to start school there the very next day. We knew nothing about the school, and in fact, hadn't even known where it was. We met a lovely teacher, Ms. Ierisi, as she was leaving the school, after a full day working in her hot classroom preparing for the start of a new school year. She spoke to us, and after hearing our story, turned around, and took us in the school to walk around with her. Our older daughter, it turns out, would be in her class the very next day. Thus, began our 15-year connection to Laurel.

Mrs. Workman, Principal at the time, was able to hire me as an Instructional Aide at the school, while our daughters attended. In my 15 years at the school, I moved through 3 Principals, working in every grade level, and in many different positions. During my time at Laurel, I was

privileged and honored to work with such an incredible and dedicated group of people.

These people are my family. They walked with me through our difficult transition to school and employment in the district, through my father's death and my mother's health issues; through our 2-year journey to Germany to live and work, through my one-year detour to homeschool one daughter through 9th grade and back again to Laurel.

As I cleaned out closets last night, I parted with many an old shirt, but the shirts that say, "Think Laurel", have retained their position of honor on my shelves. They are a piece of our family's past; one that I can't let go of.

Our older daughter, a Laurel 2001 graduate, still wears her Laurel Choir shirt. So, Laurel Elementary is a family tradition. I keep in contact with many of my former colleagues, who are now my forever friends. Each and every person I served with at Laurel impacted me, our children, or our family in some way; however, a few names need special recognition: Tommi Sue Cox, Karen Harris, Eileen Lebsack, Wendy Reed, Tino Roybal, Carla Arellano, Jill Wood, Marie Stringer, Debbie Graff, Deb Leicester, Ed Castro. These are just a few of the incredible people whose lives touched ours. Thank you Laurel Elementary!!

Sandy Kammerzell: Office Manager from 1987 to 2005

A few memories relayed to Ed Castro...

I replaced Shirley McKenzie, who hated the computer version of everything. I did learn much from her.

I remember the World's Biggest Burrito with Phil Huerta and his *grito* [a Mexican yell].

Richard [Sadowske] and Jim [Ogan] doing, *"Who's on First?"*

The photo of Einstein in the lounge with hair on end. I looked at it and thought that it looked like Bud Hill [PE teacher] after a week with the little Laurelites around him.

Bud was such a gentleman. When it snowed, he would go out and shovel off the windshield of some of the single ladies.

Alberstons had a promo on table settings with a design I grew up with. I wanted to get them but thought there's no way I can do enough grocery shopping to get it all. I put out a blurb to the staff that if you happen to go over, and get the stamps, and you don't want them, bring them to me. That's how I got it my table setting! [got emotional].

The big change I was a part of was the change to all things computers. I remember one gal from CSU who I asked to fill out a time card on the electric typewriter. She did not know how to use a typewriter!

Security was another big change. We all had to get the walkie-talkies. Now I can't even get into the front door without pressing the button.

I remember a lot of laughter going on. Good people!

Yes, Sherry Ritch slipped and fell down, out in the entrance area at Laurel. Was sure she could get up and kept refusing my offer to call an ambulance - just wanted a little more time to try on her own. Was in a lot of pain - but didn't want any help from us, either. After about 15 minutes, Bud Hill walked through - looked down at her, got the lowdown from us and simply said, "If

that was my wife lying there for 15 minutes, I'd get the ambulance." That's all it took - I wheeled around and got on the horn w/ 911.

Laurel Memories

Sherry Workman

Principal 1990-2001

One of my most vivid memories is about my getting the principal's job at Laurel. Although this account is not history book worthy, it may be of interest to those who were around in 1990.

Perhaps destiny played a part in my coming to Laurel, because I was *not* even looking for a job. I had a different plan, a solid plan.

The Plan: My husband would to pursue his doctorate at the University of Texas in Austin, and I would find a job there. Since it is very difficult to find an educational position in that area, I resigned my position as principal of an elementary school on two campuses and signed on with an Education Service Center, a branch of the Texas Education Agency based in Austin.

(In case you didn't know, Texas was the king of school reform at that time and operated 20+ Regional Service Centers that offered support for the reform that included training for teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards.)

While reading an article in *Education Week* that my boss recommended, I turned to the continuation on the last page, and there it was. Weld County School District 6 (Greeley) was advertising for an elementary principal. Having fallen in love with Fort Collins on a road trip in 1985, we had fantasied about moving there. Intrigued, I showed the ad to my husband. A few minutes later, he said, "Throw your hat in the ring. CSU has my program." The plan had changed, and I began to send applications to numerous Colorado school districts.

Thursday, April 18, 1990, (or thereabouts) I drove two hours to Dallas to catch a midnight (yes, midnight) flight to Denver. I toured three schools the next day and

interviewed at each in the evening with Laurel-Harris's being my last. At my Harris visit, I remember a small student touching the small pin on my navy blue dress that had four children of different colors and saying, "all the children." He got the message. Right then, I decided to wear that dress instead of changing into a suit for my interviews.

Although I fell in love with Laurel-Harris, it was undoubtedly the worst interview I have ever given. I was exhausted, and it showed. I remember only one question: If snow began to cover the walks just before students were to arrive, what would you do? Answer: Put on my boots that I stored in my office and take a lesson in snow-shoveling.

After a good night's sleep, I drove to Castle Rock for five more interviews that used a completely different approach. All of the interviews were conducted at the administrative complex along with numerous other positions. It was very orchestrated and timed to the minute. Between interviews, applicants munched on lavish fruit trays and made small talk with the competition.

When it was my turn to ask questions during one of my interviews, I asked about the diversity of their school. The interviewers smiled and looked at each other, and one said, "Pretty much what you see in front of you." The panel was all women, all blond. Most of you who know me can imagine how that struck me. But, that wasn't the thing I remembered most. At no point had I seen a school, students or teachers.

Back in the hotel, as I was trying to process the last few days, Poudre called to offer me a job. Now, this is where my memory gets fuzzy. *(Remember, that was 28 years ago, and I had just completed eight interviews.)* I know that I had to meet with the three area executives, and I am assuming that they made the decision about placement, unless the schools had input. Of course, if I had had a choice, it would have been Laurel.

Changing our plan of going to Austin to packing our bags for Ft. Collins in a matter of a few short weeks, it could only be destiny.

(What happened to Greeley? They misfiled my application...destiny again.)

Now, some possible ramblings for the history book.

When I think about Laurel, memories flood my mind, some happy, some sad. While most of my stories must remain confidential, they are not the piece that endears Laurel to me. It was the caring atmosphere. I felt it right away while observing the interactions of staff and students on that first visit. An inclusive environment nurtured by dedicated professionals, supported by skilled paraprofessionals, set the stage for learning.

A get-acquainted day was arranged in May for staff to introduce me to important traditions. It was a great welcome, complete with the song *The Yellow Rose of Texas*. Later, as I cleaned out files, I realized how difficult it must have been several years prior for the staff to begin the school year after the suicide of their principal without having much closure.

I always believed my main job was to make sure that teachers had an environment conducive to teaching and learning, so my focus was on safety and resources. Safety was always the top priority, because I believed that parents did not care what we could teach their children if we could not keep them safe.

Safety

- Tornado drills (I remember staff questioning this one, but remember, I came from tornado alley.)
- Arranging with a church for us to evacuate campus to their facility, if needed
- I drove around the neighborhood before school dismissed looking for the suspicious man who had been reported trying to get a student into his car.
- Noticed gang symbols, graffiti, language – contact Greeley PD, met Ken Buck, then Weld County DA, current congressman – he was taking a hardline on gang issues – attended some workshops, worked with FC gang unit – after some students tried to wear gang colors for the Halloween parade, students were required to describe their costumes in writing prior to the celebration.

- Behavior contracts required to qualify for ECO because not following rules in the mountains could put themselves and others in jeopardy.
- One evening, loaded a student's bike into my car and drove him home to get him away from a potential fight.
- Practiced lockdowns before they were standard practice.
- Ran away with a student who decided to run away from school; that was a long walk, but he eventually calmed down so we could return to school.
- Gave my private phone number on the back of my business card to students who were fragile and told them to call me anytime; two of them committed suicide in high school.
- At ECO, told students if they were not silent while passing two bull elk fighting, I would take them home, and they knew I meant it.
- Installed doorbell for Base Camp & front door
- After 9-11, bought cell phones for one person in each wing and had meeting with Muslim parents

Resources

- One of the most important things I did was hire staff who would embrace the Laurel culture, yet bring new ideas.
- Had only worked with whole staffing units. First principals' meeting to allocate staffing, I had no preparation for the process. It reminded me of the stock exchange floor. When it came my turn, I passed saying that I would have the process figured out by the end of the alphabet, and I would be asking for our fair share at that time. Over the years, I actually enjoyed that process especially when I realized that I could pay one person from several sources to give more flexibility. I would use colored post-it notes on my kitchen peninsula for days until I met as many parameters as possible. (Common planning time, time for specials to reset between classes, duty free lunch, etc.) Then, I'd transfer it all to a spreadsheet. Sometimes, I would wake up in the middle of the night with an idea and go to the peninsula.
- Helped write grants

- Repeatedly resisted programs that would stretch our resources (placing an ED program on our campus)
- Since a direct amount of the bond was allocated for the new Laurel, I made sure we received the whole amount. Prices came down between the proposal time and the actual building, and I did not want any of that money redirected to other projects. As a result, we added more technology, a special gym floor, glass walls in the media center, a retractable stage, cabinetry in the classrooms (?), heated sidewalk in front of the school, snow blower, island in the teacher's lounge, vending machine, and lastly, the fish tank.

New School

- First week in FC, went with parents to a board meeting discussing potential new buildings
- Move into Barton, part of Barton students would stay with us
- Parent coffees with families from Barton (I don't even like coffee.)
- Dismiss school one week early to pack and move
- Having staff meeting in library as back rooms of laurel passed windows on a truck
- Started school one week late to allow for moving in to new laurel
- Emotional closing of Harris
- Traffic paths at new Laurel, curve created to reduce noise for a senior with health issues
- Neighbor reported that area was a buffalo wallow
- Had to do study for water rights for the water ditch that ran under the property
- Note in my mailbox at Barton from parent stating she would be watching to be sure teachers were working

Funny things

- Came back to school one night to work wearing t-shirt and cutoff jeans to find the parking lot full of cars. Wondering what function I had forgotten, I was relieved to find it was a City ping-pong tournament.
- First snow came on Oct 12. After school, I bought a coat.
- When talking to kids about issues, I always closed by asking if there was anything else I needed to know. You would be surprised about the unrelated items that came up that I definitely needed to know. When I asked Pancho, he said, “Yes, you need to know Spanish if you are going to talk to talk to Juan next.” Of course, I asked him to stay and translate for me.
- Spanish-speaking students would occasionally use profanity in Spanish, because they knew my comprehension was poor. Sometimes, I would bluff my way through by saying, “I hope I didn’t just hear inappropriate language.” Other times, I would ask one of our senior Hispanic aides the meaning of a particular word. With a twinkle in her eye, she would always ask, “Senora, do you really want me to say that word?” She said that she could not believe that she was teaching me profanity before I even learned polite conversational Spanish.
- More Spanish mistakes – I liked to talk with children in the office as they were registering for school, often using the fish tank as a conversation starter. I was talking to a Spanish-speaking kindergartener about the *pescado* rather than using the correct *pez*. No wonder she looked at me strangely when I asked to counts the pescados.
- Security systems always have their own peculiarities. However, Laurel’s sounded three times in one night, and principals must respond. The firemen searched and could find nothing. While waiting in the teachers’ lounge the third time, the heat cut on, and I noticed that the warm air from the vent blew a helium birthday balloon across the security sensor. Problem solved.

- In the mid-nineties, we were issued cell phones for the first time. My first call was to our office manager to come rescue me as my skirt was trapped in the south wing door, and the door had no key access from the outside. Thank goodness, she answered because I was beginning to wonder if I was going to have to take my skirt off and run for the front door.
- Stranded at school during snow storm late at night, could not find a shovel, shoveled with a trash can lid, pushed all of snow off in front of the car and in back of the car, then had a hill to negotiate. Staff gave me a snow shower: tire chains, mre meals, kitty litter, and lots of advice.

Best gift

- A stone soap dish shaped like a fish with the message from a mother: “I thought the idea of a stone fish trying to swim represents my son well. Thanks for helping to keep him afloat this year.”

Best compliment

- From 6th grade girl: you never give up on any of us

The Laurel Nature Club: A Memoir by Kevin J. Cook Mentor, 1992-1999

A small portion of the Laurel Elementary School campus appeared like a miniature forest with some trees and shrubs, grasses and wildflowers growing in a compact community. Exploring it one day, I noticed some movement so stopped to see if the creature involved might come out in the open. It did. It was a Gerbil, probably a pet someone tired of so turned loose with wishful ambitions that it would survive.

Seeing that Gerbil in that place at that time stimulated a lot of thinking —I cannot overemphasize “*a lot*”—the consequence of which was a proposal to Ed Castro to form an after-school nature club. He liked the idea and performed the administrative magic to make it happen.

We opened it to any fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. After a

few meetings, the Laurel Nature Club began to develop an identity derived from the enthusiasm of the students and the support of their parents.

Our first project involved trying to expand the growing area of a shrub known as American Black Currant. At that time and to this day, that currant species only grows wild in three places in Colorado. One of those places was along the Cache la Poudre River within Fort Collins city limits. One population grew within a quarter mile of the school: between the river and the slope from the old pickle factory immediately west of Lemay Avenue.

With permission from the city forester, we went to that area and clipped twigs from the shrubs, three twigs per shrub and one twig per student. The twigs were taken back to school and halfway immersed in a jar of water. And then the botany began.

We had lectures, conversations, and discussions about plants and plant anatomy, how plants grow, what makes a woody plant and how shrubs and trees differ. We talked about the difference between rare and endangered species, about plant geography, and all sorts of related topics. Club members were expected to learn; club meetings and activities were not just play time and social events. And they did learn.

Over the course of several weeks, the twigs sprouted roots in the water. Club members were taught and expected to learn the difference between leaves, stems, and roots. And when the twigs' roots had developed enough, we took the twigs down to the river and planted them. Some lived and some died. The Laurel Nature Club project elevated awareness within Fort Collins's various administrative departments—parks, forestry, natural resources—and now, more than 25 years later, the American Black Currant population along the Cache la Poudre River in Fort Collins numbers more than 6,000 plants.

Other projects were much less intense. Someone found a dead Eastern Screech-Owl, a species protected by federal law. Explaining the legal requirements to the Nature Club, they proposed writing a letter to ask permission to keep the Eastern Screech-Owl so it could be taxidermically preserved and mounted as a specimen for display in one of the school's hallway showcases. The letter was written and sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which sent a return letter that served as a legal permit giving permission to keep, preserve, and display the little owl. While a taxidermist was working on the owl, club members drew background material to create a sense of forest within the showcase. The taxidermy done, the owl arrived and was placed in the showcase as an educational

display.

As the club members bonded as friends and colleagues, ambitions grew and activities got bigger. Two activities that are especially memorable involved overnight trips.

One trip involved a visit to the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs. The Zoo had special program arrangements for student groups to stay overnight inside the Zoo, which we did. It was a night full of animal sounds not heard during the day.

Another trip involved a long drive to Kearney, Nebraska, just to see the great flocks of Sandhill Cranes. While there, we visited Fort Kearney where we walked out to an old railroad bridge. We saw Wood Ducks and Bald Eagles, we heard American Woodcocks, and we experienced the drama of Sandhill Cranes arriving by the hundreds and eventually thousands to spend the night roosting in the Platte River.

Some projects and activities were more successful than others, and some had wholly unexpected outcomes. One stands out as particularly memorable. The Nature Club got a grant from Wal-Mart to buy a couple trees to plant on the Laurel Elementary School campus. The trees were specifically chosen for their botanical uniqueness: they were deciduous conifers.

As part of the learning in the Nature Club, precision of language was emphasized as a critical way to communicate effectively. As part of this theme, the terms “deciduous,” “evergreen,” and “conifer” came into discussion. Explanations included describing “deciduous” and “evergreen” as paired terms referring to a plant’s leaves and how long they last; deciduous leaves last one growing season and evergreen leaves last many growing seasons. The question arose about “conifer.” Club members asked why we had a term for plants that grow their seeds in cones—hence “conifers”—but we did not have a companion term for plants that grow their seeds in fruits. The question prompted some thinking on my part; and as a result, I coined the term “fruitifer,” which I have been using for almost 30 years.

So the Nature Club got the grant, the money arrived, and some special trees were bought and planted. They were a Bald-Cypress and a European Larch. They were specifically chosen because they are deciduous conifers, which emphasizes the botanical distinction of terms that are often used interchangeably as if they are synonyms. The idea was that landscaping on the school campus could take on the character of an

outdoor classroom, a concept enthusiastically endorsed by the superintendent of the school district.

All was well until winter came. Autumn means a change in photoperiod that causes trees and shrubs to shed their leaves then grow new ones come the photoperiod of spring. This topic of photoperiod, leaf fall, deciduous, and conifer was all discussed as part of Nature Club activities. So, as expected, when autumn arrived, the needles of the Bald-Cypress and European Larch yellowed then fell leaving the coniferous trees bare as skeletons. Over Christmas break, the school district grounds crew cut down the trees assuming that they had died! The outcome of the project was that the Nature Club decided students weren't the only ones who needed to learn!

The last big project of the Laurel Nature Club took on a much bigger scope. The Colorado Division of Wildlife had decided to reestablish Lynxes within Colorado by trapping some in Alaska and Canada then bringing them to Colorado where they would be released. Since the mascot of Laurel Elementary School was the Lynx, endorsing the proposal to bring Lynxes to Colorado so they could become a wild species here once again seemed like a great project for the Club. Individual members took on different tasks, and soon Laurel Elementary School was a visible part of the backing for the state's Lynx project.

The project won essential support. And now all these years later the estimate of statewide Lynx population numbers over 200 wild and free-living animals.

Like so many things in Nature, the Laurel Nature Club had a life expectancy. Students moved on to junior high school, and circumstances indicated the time had come to retire the Club. It was hard to do because so many wonderful things had been done and achieved. Oddly, looking back from a quarter century later, I remember the activities and the events, the questions and the challenges, the successes the glitches and the failures; but I have a hard time remembering the students who were involved. Hopefully, those students who were members of the Laurel Nature Club will suffer the same problem. I hope they remember what they accomplished more than they remember me.

Memories and experiences I cherish about my time at Laurel

Tommi Sue Cox June 29, 2020

- My memory about the interview and hiring process:

I didn't make the first round, apparently! Karen Harris, beloved paraprofessional for 30 years, shared with me after several years at Laurel, that the interview committee reconvened for a second round of interviews and she was the one responsible for putting my resume forward for consideration. I had interviewed for principal positions in Colorado Springs before getting a call to interview in Fort Collins. I declined an offer in Colorado Springs because it seemed like such a huge city! I remember my interview at Laurel was held in a classroom with about twelve adults on the interview committee. It was daunting. I felt really relaxed, though because I had nothing to lose. I was happy to stay in my hometown, if I didn't get the position. I remember visiting a couple of classrooms – particularly a Kindergarten classroom where Mrs. Marie Stringer was teaching a lesson about seeds. As I tried to leave her classroom, I tried to exit through a closet, which Mrs. Stringer and I still laughed about from time to time until she retired in 2018. I then interviewed with Mr. Joe Hendrickson, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, and Dr. Don Unger, the Superintendent. They were so kind and, although I have no recollection of what I was asked, I must have had the right answers! When I was offered the job and accepted the position, the Assistant Superintendent, Mr. Hendrickson, asked me to come to Laurel so he could introduce me. I was deeply moved by the staff welcoming me with smiles, cheers, and enthusiasm. It was amazing! I remember calling my aunt and telling her. She said, "Always remember this day and how you felt because there will be hard days ahead. You'll need to remind yourself you are wanted there."

- Laurel is my first, and only principal position. It has been my honor to serve this beautifully diverse school community. When I started, we had a building full of veteran teachers. The average years of teaching experience in our building was 17 years. These wonderful veteran

teachers served as mentor teachers to many student teachers over their years. I hired at least five of those brand-new teachers. I knew they had an outstanding, rigorous student teaching experience at Laurel.

- Beginning with the 2018-19 school year, students have enrolled whose parents were Laurel students in my first years as principal. I treasure the generational impact we have on educating Fort Collins' youth. We are truly a family at Laurel and value every staff member, every family member, every volunteer, and every student. I'm thankful we have a climate and culture of maintaining strong relationships with staff, students, and families.
- Our diversity is so unique in Fort Collins and is such a gift to our students and their families. I grew up in two very diverse, small-town communities. I have felt that Laurel was a perfect fit for me because of the variety of diversity – academic, economic, ethnic, linguistic, etc. Serving the homeless shelter in Fort Collins brings an additional diverse experience to our environment. I am always reminding staff and families about the unique gift of learning, working, and growing in a diverse school community. Because our identities are formed in the early years, we give our students positive experiences with diversity and they carry these memories and experiences with them throughout their life. When they encounter people in their neighborhoods and workplaces who don't look like them, learn like them, or speak like them, they still value the beautiful person inside who is not all that different from them. Valuing every person is a way of life because that's what they learned to do at Laurel.
- A highly cherished memory I have is having two of my three children attend Laurel. I was so thankful to be able to attend my own children's programs, class events, and share the Laurel experience with them. I am certain Tim and Danni are kind, caring, empathic adults today because they were positively shaped by their excellent teachers and positive experience at Laurel.