

Columbus School 100th Anniversary

Happy New Year folks...This year marks Columbus School's 100th birthday so all of you "kids" from the high plains of Lodi might want to send a birthday card to the school you love most...I'm one of those kids...class of 1961. I can still remember my teachers from kindergarten through 8th grade. Okay. Since you asked I'll name them for you, Starting with kindergarten there was Mrs. Adelaide Wolfe, 1st grade was Mrs. Ann Lally, 2nd grade was Mrs. Santina Gandolfo, 3rd grade was Miss Evelyn Diorio (my all-time favorite who, by the way, gave me the correct spelling for the names you are reading), 4th was Mr. Frank Sproviero, 5th was Mrs. Cimiluca whose first name escapes me, 6th was Mr. Jules Lacitola, 7th was Miss Ann Manfred (sister of principle Ethel Matthews), 8th Grade was shared by Miss Diorio, herself a former student at Columbus School and Miss Mary Annicharico. Our Gym teacher, who showed up every Friday like an angel of mercy was Mr. Delabadia (Mr. Del for short...another great educator who's enthusiastic smile still shines in my memory). Later there was a rookie gym teacher and basketball player extraordinaire by the name of Mr. Tony Comellio. Oh yea...there was everyone's favorite substitute teacher who went by the name Miss Mac...which was short for something ...I'm going to go out on a limb and say Maculla. Does anyone from that era remember her? When Miss Mac walked into the classroom it was like seeing your grandmother carrying a fresh baked apple pie with a look on her face that said "okay children today is your lucky day." And it was! For me it was the first time that I felt loved outside of my home and I'd bet that all the kids felt the same way. God bless you Miss Mac. Oh wait...I can't forget our Music teacher who dropped in from time to time trying to explain what a G clef was. Her name was Mrs. Frolich, and next to Arithmetic, hers was my least favorite subject. ..Alright maybe it was a tie! E, G, B, D, F was the letters she used to identify the 5 lines of a music scale. To make it easier for us to make sense of it she translated it as follows: "Every Good Boy Does Fine." It certainly did not apply to me!

Much praise goes out to all of those marvelous teachers since they put their hearts and souls into their job as I'm sure teachers of today do – I hope. They had to educate a wide range of students, some of which were driving to school in 7th grade. A few of them, as I recall, had five o'clock shadows by two in the afternoon with a pack of Lucky strikes sticking out of their shirt pockets. With that having been said there wasn't a bully to be found, in fact they were more like teachers' aides. Some of my classmates were: John Leto, Nick Enea, Dominick Montalbo, Richard DeCrosta, a curly headed kid by the name of David Van rye, Loretta Cardone, Donna Manzella, Bonnie Karpinski, Josephine Calari, Joann Wanus, Glen Philips, Sal losauro and his sister Mimma ...one of the prettiest girls in Columbus school. I was lucky enough sit next to her in eighth grade and let me tell you folks that her smile brightened many an overcast day. I'll never forget her.

In many ways we Columbus School students were a sheltered bunch. Our school was built a good distance away from surrounding schools. Others like Wilson, Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt were located near or at the very heart of town so the kids were worldlier than we were. We only knew that part of Lodi that was on the hill near the Garfield border. The open fields, the dirt roads, the quiet streets and the corner store. We were happy in our sequestered little part of town which began and ended within the safe haven that was Columbus School. My world, for all I knew, was flat and to venture beyond that imaginary border meant that I'd fall off, never to be found. It all makes sense to me

now...now that I have more years behind me than I do ahead of me. I'll always be that kid from Columbus School and in many ways have not roamed beyond that sacred play ground.

They were far more advanced than us kids from the hill. While I was wearing a floppy gray hat with built in earmuffs those other kids sported Hollywood haircuts and wore Flagg Brother shoes .That's why, at least for me, entering Lodi High School was overwhelming. I went from that cozy little classroom at Columbus School to a veritable explosion of students of which, in all honesty, I never really got used to. I graduated in 1965 just as intimidated and insecure as the day I went in. I never outgrew that school ground mentality. I was always the kid from Columbus School and remained far from the social mainstream. I hung out with the same kids I knew since kindergarten i.e. Mike Ettz, Irwin Stolz, Frank Scinlari , Johnny Rannou and the rest. I'm not saying that all the kids from Columbus felt the same way, just the kids in my immediate class. There were those who adjusted well and went on to enjoy those once in a lifetime experiences that only high school can offer. The kids in Miss Diorio's class, like me, kept a rather low profile and in our own unassuming way enjoyed ourselves...at least I did.

Now a story about Columbus School would not be complete without telling you about a trouble makers worse nightmare...our silver haired principle, the legendary Mrs. Ethel Matthews . Folks let me tell you that this woman was the embodiment of power and authority. She walked tall and straight, her bluish gray hair always in place with eyeglasses that glittered in the dimly lit hallways giving her a larger than life aura that to an impressionable child seemed nothing short of supernatural. Mrs. Matthews had a special place set aside for the troublemaker. It was a little nook located just outside her office in full view of passersby. It was called "The Bad Bench" and sitting there wasn't half as bad as being escorted there by the back of your collar. Once, while in 4th grade, I saw our principle chase a trouble maker around the classroom and finally pulling him out from under a table by his ankles. The rest of us watched in awe as the mischief maker was led away in a blubbering heap to the dreaded bad bench. The kid was later escorted back into the classroom, hand in hand, by Mrs. Matthews who by now wore a loving smile as was seen by all. The student became the quintessence of good conduct and received many a gold star for his efforts.

Mrs. Matthews seldom if ever raised her voice since her mere presence was loud enough to keep you in line. She used neither hand nor ruler to enforce the law however what she did use, instead was her authority. That woman walked around like she owned the place and let me tell you folks ...she did!

What a marvelous woman was our Mrs. Matthews. It is only fitting then that there is a portrait of her hanging in the hallway adjacent to her office. You can't miss it. Her eyes follow you around as if she is letting you know that she is still very much in charge...at least on a spiritual level . Current principle Mr. Vincent Di Chiara, who began in June of 2002 and his administrative assistant Anelle Sproviero Rossi continue to keep the "school on the hill" a marvelous place for learning where children dream of great things and are given the tools to make their dreams come true... Happy 100th Anniversary Columbus School.

To all the students, teachers, Principals and Janitors (My dad Vito being of the latter) past present and future ...God Bless you.

Special thanks to Miss Evelyn Diorio for helping me to remember the students and the teachers of my glorious youth. I'm proud to call her my friend...however I still cannot find it in me to call her by her first name. To me she will always be my eighth grade teacher - Miss Diorio.

To read more about my Columbus School memories visit us on line at <http://www.the-gazette-newspaper.com/>