

Book Launch

Stories of Community

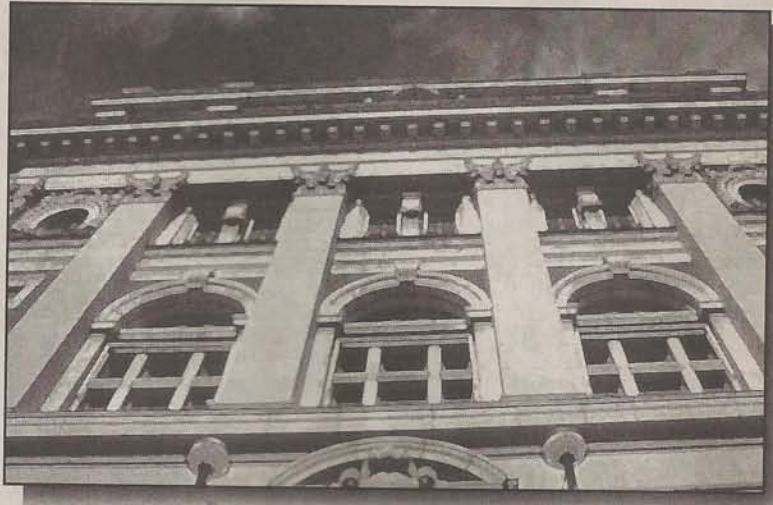
Edited by Karen Gummo and Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett

Tales of Dr. E.W. Coffin School

Do You Remember?

Two years ago, Dr. E.W. Coffin Elementary School in Brentwood Heights hosted a 25th anniversary celebration of its reopening after being destroyed by fire in 1974. Many felt the devastation wrought by arson one extremely cold winter's night, and rejoiced the following year with the opening of the new building in the spring of 1975. At the time of the celebration, stories and reminiscences were collected on the entire, now 35-year, history of the school.

At last, hot off the presses, you can now own the book that rediscovers the story of a people who pulled together to rebuild what they had lost, and what was so precious to them. What was never lost, however, was a powerful sense of community and purpose.



In chronicling the history of Dr. Coffin School, *Stories of Community* has become much more than just a recording of school events. It showcases ideas and environmental projects at Dr. Coffin which have had a significant and ongoing impact on a far-ranging community.

Dr. Coffin school has been very important in the lives of many community members, students, teachers, staff and parents, now scattered about Calgary and beyond, during the years since it was first built in Canada's centennial year.

Stories of Community features more than 160 pages of original prose, poetry and artwork, as well as colour photographs and archival documents. This non-profit publication was supported by a neighbourhood grant from The Calgary Foundation.

To pre-order your copy of this extraordinary pocket of Calgary history, or for details of the book launch, please contact the school at 5615 Barrett Drive NW, T2L 1W4, phone 777-6190, or fax 777-6192. Stay tuned for more details in your October community newsletter.

ENVIRO NEWS

ENGAGING DIVERSITY

Honouring and maintaining diversity is the key to sustainability. Whether we're working to protect wildlands and endangered species, teaching or learning in an overcrowded classroom or careening joyously downhill on a mountain bike, the recognition that "differences woven together are strengths" leads to an active appreciation of diversity. Embracing diversity does not mean tolerating a free-for-all, anything goes, buyer beware society. It does mean active listening and increasing one's understanding of the larger impacts of action, reaction and interaction.

September's Gold: Biodiversity at Farmers' Markets

Yes, shopping at your local farmers' market supports biodiversity! Local farms tend to produce a greater variety of items, and tend toward less chemical and genetic control than larger monoculture operations. Transportation and energy costs are lower and, thus, better for our environment. A local economy is supported and a lot of fun is had by shopping in the open air, meeting and chatting with neighbours, tasting tempting samples and taking a little moment to revere the freshness.

Check out www.asapconnections.org for more details from the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) on their 10 reasons to buy local food:

1. Locally grown food tastes better.
2. Local produce is better for you.
3. Local food preserves genetic diversity.
4. Local food is not genetically modified.

5. Local food supports local farm families.

6. Local food builds community.

7. Local food preserves open space.

8. Local food keeps your taxes in check.

9. Local food supports a clean environment and benefits wildlife.

10. Local food is about the future.

Although a long way from Alberta, the ASAP points are universal. Once, while living in Appalachia, I remember coming across a rather unusual, low-energy-use farmer's garden. But how I happened upon it is the real story.

It was in east Tennessee, and I went on an expedition down into the depths of one of the ubiquitous cave systems in the region. I clambered along behind the veteran spelunkers and slipped through the unassuming tiny sink-hole after them. We squeezed through cracks, crawled on hands and knees and

scrambled over walls of boulders that opened into vast chambers. We waded through underground streams and pulled along on our bellies, only to find we'd taken a wrong turn and had to squirm back again. For 10 hours, we were underground, all sense of direction askew. Headlamp batteries dimmed, flickered and extinguished. Our guides, ever confident, set alight the acetylene flames of their carbide lamps, giving off a warm diffuse illumination of the passages and chambers we had yet to traverse.

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This was not the beginner's cave I had anticipated.

At last we glimpsed a speck of light and scurried upward with the rushing current of cave air, buoyed with the notion of gulping fresh air under a big sky. Instead, at the end of the absolutely fascinating, but truly grueling journey, we emerged into the centre of a huge greenhouse garden, surrounded by blossoming flowers and a bounteous array of fruit and vegetables. All were keeping snug, year round, within the warm, constant temperature air flowing upward from the cave system.*

We all know how inconstant the air temperature is here in Alberta, and how short the growing season is, so go to your local farmers' markets this month, before the frosts kill and the snows fly, if they haven't already.

What's Happening in Whispering Woods?

But then there's the greenhouse effect designed to kill.

There's a little natural area park, Whispering Woods, on Brenner Drive in Calgary's northwest. It has been adopted by Dr. E.W. Coffin school through the City of Calgary Naturals Areas program. Adjacent to Nose Hill, it's a precious little piece of natural prairie within a suburban neighbourhood, resplendent with its own subtle biodiversity. But it's being invaded by a monoculture!

Brome grass is threatening to choke out the native species. An arson-inspired fire swept through the park in 1999, and the brome has been chasing the path of the flames ever since.

The City of Calgary is trying a non-chemical experiment to eradicate the brome and restore the native prairie. A semicircular area with a five-metre radius has been trimmed and covered with clear plastic. The intent is to heat, bake and kill the brome. This, of course, will also kill the struggling native plants being choked out by the brome. The idea is to then rototill the area and re-establish the native species. If this inexpensive, non-chemical method works, it will be applied to larger brome-infested areas. If anyone has experience with this, or other non-toxic methods, please share your expertise. And please, do help keep an eye on protecting this valuable experiment.

Restoration is a long-term commitment, and recognizes the importance of the natural diversity, which requires our attention to sustain it. Enjoy September's golden bounty from the markets, as well as the golden land about us, before it heads for its lengthy seasonal slumber.

*Environmentally yours, Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett
plknowlton.cockett@shaw.ca*

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