

The History Corner
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Caleb's Final Day Ever at North Shore School

I was hoping for a nice morning. In my mind I was envisioning wispy clouds stretched in long brush strokes across a sky deep and rich in blueness. Instead, another overcast and sunless dawn greeted me. In a spring filled with wet, rainy days I wasn't really surprised by this, but I couldn't mask my disappointment either. I was really hoping this day would be different. Heading to the kitchen I poured a cup of coffee before making my way outside. Possibly, if I examined the sky more closely, I would find the cloud cover to be thin, just a light veil of morning mist that the warmth of the rising sun would do battle with, and win. But as I looked up, I could see that the clouds weren't thin, they were steel gray and endless, stretching across the sky and deep into it.

I went back inside and woke Caleb. On school days we have our schedule down pretty well. After waking, he heads to the kitchen eating his two bowls of cereal as I pour my second cup of coffee. He gets the bathroom first. I watch ten minutes of news while he showers. He gets dressed, checks his backpack for schoolwork, yells to me what time it is and at 7:32 we head out the door. This morning would be a little different however. It was the last day of school and he was going light, no backpack, no books, no homework to turn in. I made sure the milk and juice were put away, set the dirty dishes in the sink, and headed for the door.

I grabbed my hat and the dog leash that was hanging under it from the coat rack in the entry. Hearing the jingle of the chain Abbie was already half way across the living room by the time I called her name. Tail wagging, she stood at the door and waited for it to be opened. Caleb let her out and she ran down the driveway ahead of us. The sky appeared as thick and gray as it was an hour earlier, but at least the rain which still seemed inevitable, was holding off. For the last twelve years, with one of my children or the other, I had made this quarter mile walk a thousand times or more, out the driveway and down the gravel road to the bus stop. And this morning was to be my last. It was Caleb's final day ever at North Shore School.

Past Ripberger's mailbox, down the dip in the road where Mace Creek flows and where the cowslips grow every spring, back up on the flat again, past the driveway leading to Lindberg's, and then the last hundred yards to the end of the road where we arrived at the bus stop.

Instinctively, Caleb bent down, picked up a rock, and threw it. It was a game he played most mornings. Challenging himself to see if he could hit a specific tree, or pole, or fence post before the bus came. He was still throwing rocks when we began to notice low dark clouds beginning to form in the sky. The newly forming clouds appeared much darker, yet oddly less dense, than the gray clouds they were back-dropped against, like the first smoke out of a chimney from a just started fire. The contrast between the two cloud masses gave the appearance of a sudden dust storm streaking across a vast prairie of gray. Then almost without warning a huge wave of wind hit. Trees bent forward in unison upon the initial blow and then swayed wildly back and forth as the wave completely engulfed them. A rush of cold air swept over Caleb and I, followed by another phalanx of even blacker clouds that seemed to literally be bouncing along the treetops. Clouds began moving in all directions, rolling, tumbling, colliding with each other, fighting with each other for a piece of the sky. And then as suddenly as it had begun, it was over. The wind died, the low dark clouds drifted away, and only the steely gray sky remained. We looked at

each other in amazement, not sure what we had just experienced but feeling, whatever it was, it was certainly a fitting send-off to his final day.

From down the hill we could hear the bus coming. It stopped across from us and as Caleb got on I waved one final time to Joanne, his driver for all these years. I watched as the bus slowly started up the road and then turned and headed back towards home. As I did I felt the first rain drop hit me. A few more drops started falling and then as I reached the dip in the road the sky opened up and began dumping buckets. Abbie and I walked home as the rain poured down upon us. There would be no blue skies today but oddly enough I no longer felt disappointment because of it.