

West Side:
The Biography of a School

On November 27, 1951, neighbors of five classic one-room Sonoma County rural schools voted, in effect, to put those schools out of business.

The schools, Daniels, Felta, Junction, Lafayette and Mill Creek, had served families on the western side of the Russian River honorably and well since the early years of the century. Now changing times, including demands for expanded resources and greater efficiency, required a new approach: consolidation.

While it was recognized that the whole area would benefit from a combined operation (one of the schools had shrunk to an enrollment of five students), there was also concern that the localized quality of the schools, with their high degree of individual attention, parental participation and community support, might be lost.

In a transition from neighborhood schoolhouse to school district, students were assigned by grade to the different country schools, while planning and construction of a new unified school got underway.

A site rich in local legend.

The new school site, a prune orchard at the confluence of Felta Creek and Mill Creek, about a baseball throw away from the old Felta School, dripped the sauce of local legend. The creeks were spawning streams for steelhead and Coho salmon, and Native Americans had fished and camped along them for generations. Felta Miller, an early settler, homesteaded his ranch about a mile up Felta Creek, and the green barn at the end of the county road that passed the school site was generally accepted as the original mill that Mill Creek was named for. It is believed to date from the Mexican era. Harmon Heald, a hand who worked in the mill, opened a store at a nearby crossroads, and began the town of Healdsburg. J.G. Mothorn, who founded Mill Stone Valley Ranch, on which

the barn still stands, had portions of his property landscaped by his friend, Luther Burbank. Some of Burbank's plantings, which included guavas, loquats, grafted plums, and a lily tree, survive unto the present day.

Mothorn's son used stones from a cobblestone quarry on the Mothorn ranch to build the foundation of Felta School. The school, while under construction, survived the 1906 earthquake.

Though West Side School would be new, it rested on a deep and solid base of local tradition.

Farm kids, farm traditions.

In the winter of 1956-57, all eighty-five West Side students were gathered under one roof at the new West Side Union Elementary School, summoned by the transplanted bell from the old Felta School. "It was a rural atmosphere," recalls Tim Harrington, who attended West Side during this era, sent ten children of his own to West Side, and has served on the district board for more than twenty years, "Kids were farmers. Board members were farmers. They used to close school so kids could work the prune harvest."

In a carryover from the one-room country school era, there was considerable individual attention. "Our principal, George Peabody, noticed that some of the boys liked to go down to the creek, fool around, and smoke. He bought one of those big carnival cigars and offered it to boys who thought smoking was a good thing. It served its purpose."

The principal's job was demanding. In addition to teaching and serving as principal, West Side's boss was also superintendent of schools, dealing with maintenance, transportation, budget, a board, the state, parents, kids, everything. Keeping

administrators in the job long enough to plan and implement changes proved challenging. In its first 33 years of operation, West Side Elementary had 12 superintendent/principals. Parental participation and community support were crucial to providing continuity.

“It looks like a loved place.”

The setting of the school, nestled among redwoods and orchards in a valley fed by spawning streams, helped encourage a deep awareness of the natural world among students, faculty and staff. “It looks like a loved place,” recalls Gay Kenny, who spent 24 years, six of them as principal/superintendent, at West Side, “a rewarding place to be.” The setting, and the attitude helped attract unusually dedicated teachers and made learning vivid among students. West Side’s quality of life and education began to attract interest, and transfers, from outside the district.

Student population had hovered around 100 children for years, but by the late 1970s, the makeup of the surrounding community had begun to change. The prune orchards were gone, replaced by ever-expanding ranks of vineyards. Exurban families, many of them versed in new disciplines—computer technology, medical research, scientific viticulture—had moved to the West Side area, and were seeking to combine country school nurturing and unity with nature with a quality education for their children. Interest in, and support for an expanded educational experience came with them.

Science, Gardening, Music, Cooking, Art.

There had always been a garden of some kind at West Side. Now, under Nancy Foulk, an annual gardening program was begun, with students preparing soil, planting seeds, raising and harvesting vegetables and flowers (it’s much more encouraging to eat veggies when you grow them.) An annual Science Fair gave West Side students a chance to

develop and display their involvement with scientific methodology. Sparked by grants from the California Arts Council, the school was able to offer enhanced instruction from Artist-in-Residence Marcia Connell and musician Mary Drew, plus dramatic productions mounted by Eileen Williams. Performers from the Bay Area gave students live experience of professional poetry, theatre, music and dance. Through technology grants, the school was able to place computers, printers, modems and trained staff into upper-level classrooms. The expanded education was not so much a departure from traditional small-school education as an extension of it. Parents, some of them food preparation professionals, would come into the classroom and teach the children how to cook. Elizabeth Schmidt, who managed the kitchen at the nearby Bishop's Ranch, showed a classroom of kids how to make root beer from sassafras.

Expanding the school to match the education.

To house the increased variety and participation of a West Side education (a portable classroom had been added in 1973), a unique multi-purpose room was added to the school building under superintendent/principal Terry Kneisler in 1982. A folding-wall system allowed for division into between one and four spaces, and one wall can be opened onto the school courtyard. The room, named Felta Hall, served as lunchroom, kitchen, play facility, computer classroom, theatre and community hall, and its exterior architecture, with its half-round arches, echoes the design of the old Felta School, which had become a pre-school and day-care center. The new Hall also offered an ideal gathering place for the Monthly Assemblies, which bring students, faculty and staff together for individual recognition as well as art and cultural contact. The Assemblies, which have hosted guest musicians from the Healdsburg Jazz Festivals, plays, artists and dance groups, have

become a West Side tradition. To help raise funds to support these programs, activities were added that quickly became annual events, the Jogathon, where students and student teams pledged laps in exchange for donations, and the Spaghetti Dinner, which grew into an Annual Auction. There was a conscious effort to maintain the school's individual character by expanding upon it.

Growing while staying small.

To meet the changing needs of modern education, special ed, a growing Latino community, reduced class size, applications for admission from outside the district, West Side administrators and board agreed to increase the student population while maintaining the school's intimate, personalized learning experience. "We wanted to hit 155," recalls Richard Bugarske, who became superintendent/principal in 1990, "figuring that was a good number until you got higher. We didn't do much recruiting, though we may have put ads in the paper. It was mostly word of mouth." In three years, the school grew by forty students. Out-of-district transfers grew so significantly that eventually a lottery was instituted for kindergarten.

"There was an effort to connect with the whole community," says Bugarske. "We wanted to be inclusive. We included food in celebrations. Families felt comfortable that we were looking out for their children. That if the school bus broke down, their kids would be given rides home. The family atmosphere was very strong.."

State and national recognition.

An awareness of what was happening at West Side—a community of parents and the school devoted to providing special instruction for students—began to spread beyond the immediate area. In 1993, West Side was named a California Distinguished School. That

same year, the school also received honorable mention for a National Blue Ribbon Award. “We didn’t win,” says Bugarske, “because we didn’t qualify as a statistically significant school—not large enough.”

The physical plant continued to expand, gradually, like the enrollment of the school. In 1982, two more portable classrooms were installed, and in 1997, a separate kindergarten with its own bathroom. A new water tank was added, and a work space/storage room.

With help of the California Conservation Corps, a nature path was built down to the creek, now a federally protected stream, and the subject of continuing study by the Department of Fish and Game. The Corps and local Eagle Scouts provided tools and person power, West Side food, shelter and a plan. The path is refurbished annually.

With completion of Warm Springs Dam, and the opening of a fish hatchery at Lake Sonoma, student and teacher interest in fish ecology increased. A trout planting program where steelhead, raised from eggs are planted by third-graders in Mill Creek, was developed by Nancy Foulk and Rhonda Bellmer and has become an annual feature of the school. By now, it is certain that some of the full-grown steelhead returning to the creek are West Side alums.

The annual garden became an organic garden, with Lisa Phipps as gardening consultant, overseen by a garden committee composed of teachers and staff members. A donated building was added and remodeled into a greenhouse the following year.

The annual Sixth Grade Campout evolved into an overnight on the classic sailing ship Balclutha in San Francisco, where students stand watch, sing chanteys, and eat sailor food.

And in a continuation of West Side's musical tradition, a school band was formed in 2004.

Initial planning for a new wing to the school, replacing the temporary classrooms, got underway in 2004.

A neighborhood school . And more..

Despite the increased recognition and expanded programs, the school remained faithful to its roots. A quota of district children must be reached before students from outside the district can be admitted. Students are accepted in a straightforward manner, whatever their abilities or disabilities are. As the community became more affluent, with both parents not having to work, there could be a greater commitment to children's schooling. West Side has never had busing to and from the town of Healdsburg; parents must commit to providing out-of-district transportation. Fund-raising, which had expanded through events like the Auction, acquired full legal and fiduciary oversight with the forming of the Felta Education Foundation in 2003, in support of the school.

Continuity of management had long ceased to be a problem. Terry Kneisler had served as superintendent/principal for seven years; David Levine was at West Side for three, Richard Burgarske for ten years, and Gay Kenny for six. Mrs. Kenny was succeeded in 2005 by Assistant Principal Rhonda Bellmer, a ten-year veteran of West Side.

Appearances and Reality.

The physical plant and setting of a school can be unreliable guides to the quality of education offered.

Since the days when Socrates taught in the Athenian agora, outstanding education has occurred in ghettos, monasteries, barracks, even prisons. Stories of bucolic prep schools that turn out to be nightmares for students have become a cliché.

Yet at West Side, the surroundings are a true manifestation of the inner character of the school. The fact that the property is as well kept and carefully modified as any private home from the era, surrounded by generations of roses, testifies to fifty years of devoted care and maintenance, backed by community support and parent volunteerism. The presence of Felta School, still a subject for photographers and landscape artists a century after its opening, remains a powerful reminder of West Side's small-school roots. The proximity and variety of the natural world that brings students not just the words, but the music of a meaningful and effective educational start in life, remind us that there are teachers at West Side who do so in preference to opportunities to teach elsewhere. And the rows of cars and clusters of parents waiting to deliver or pick up their kids demonstrates daily the continuing reality of West Side's high degree of parental commitment and support.

At West Side School, as with few other places in life, appearances reveal reality. "It's a place you can sink your teeth into and feel you're doing something," says Gay Kenny. "If there are kids who need help, you feel like you can do something without stretching things too much."

"It's a wonderful place to be."

Part Two:

From Triumph to Tragedy in one day

The fire that tore through West Side School early on Sunday morning October 7, 2007 was the most violent event in the settled history of the small valley that the school dominates. Below a churning tower of dark smoke, swift, jagged flames mowed their way top-down through the core of a building painstakingly maintained for more than half a century.

“At first we thought the whole building was gone,” observed a Fire Chief whose company had been one of the first arriving at the scene. Some twenty-three fire companies responded, from as far away as Rincon Valley and Geyserville, with pump trucks, tankers, personnel and emergency vehicles, snaking lengths of hose and uniformed, oxygen-masked firefighters transforming the school’s most striking feature, its pastoral setting, into a kind of mini-D-day.

The fire had struck two days before the final walk-through of the school’s new wing, marking completion of a project that had occupied school administration for more than three years, and impacted faculty, students and staff during construction lasting the better part of a year. What was to be a triumph, the finish of the biggest undertaking since the school’s opening, was turned in one violent morning into a tragedy.

As crews fought the fire, teachers, students past and present and concerned neighbors stood in shock, trying to assess the damage. The school offices, the bathrooms, the teachers’ room, the library (temporarily used as a classroom during the new wing’s construction) were destroyed. Felta Hall, the adaptable, all-purpose room used for

everything from band class to day care was gone. First, second and third-grade classrooms had suffered smoke damage so severe that no one was allowed in them even to retrieve valuables. More painful was the loss of the children's work itself, records, papers, and especially the children's art.

"There were some Chinese brush paintings that they'd done, hanging in the windows," Susie Dalton, third grade teacher says, "I saw them there during the fire, hoped they could be saved, but they weren't."

The good news, to which everyone present clung, was that the fire had occurred on a weekend, when classes were not in session, and that no one had been injured or killed.

"If nobody's hurt, nobody dies," says Chris Aldrich, whose fifth-grade class lost everything, "it's just sticks and paper."

The deeper question was whether the school, half-destroyed, with its grounds already torn up from nine months of construction, could function at all. Would West Side reopen? If so, when? And if not here, then where? While the school was still burning, firefighters attacking stubborn flames, these questions were already being addressed.

For Rhonda Bellmer, West Side's Principal/Superintendent, the completion of the new wing had represented, among other things, emerging from a tunnel of construction planning, accommodation and oversight, into the light of curriculum and programs. Now she was thrust back into a potential demolition and reconstruction with an urgency that dwarfed the earlier situation. Her immediate prospects were especially daunting: in addition to school records, destroyed in the fire, she had left in her office ("The only time

I've ever done that!") a laptop containing all of the programs she had instituted during her three years as Principal.

In the kindergarten, the only surviving classroom with electric power and working phones, kindergarten teacher James Greenwald and school secretary Maggie Ross were calling parents, notifying them that classes would be cancelled for Monday and perhaps for the entire week.

Throughout the morning, faculty, staff, students and board members continued to arrive. Insurers and contractors had been notified. At 2 p.m., while the school was still smoking, a meeting was held at one of the schoolyard picnic tables with members of the school board, Bellmer, custodian Bob Lownes, insurance adjusters and cleanup company representatives squeezing adult knees into kiddie bench space.

Damage to the school was estimated at fifty percent. Preliminary investigation suggested that the cause of the fire was electrical, originating in the old wiring above the restrooms, and spreading through the common attic above the offices and library and on to Felta Hall. Insurance would cover all the damages except for a \$3500 deductible. The claims adjusters, some of whom had worked on the aftermath of both World Trade Center bombings, were ready with names of whom to call for cleanup, toxic removal, security, even fencing. If debris removal and reconstruction could be started immediately, the school could be restored to its prior state in six months. An initial check for \$97,000 would be cut immediately. The City of Healdsburg's School Department had responded with an offer of the interim use of the vacant Foss Creek School. Immediate offers required immediate decisions.

Relocating to a new site seemed an attractive option. The existing mess could be left behind, with classes resuming in a solid, existing environment. Bellmer had reservations: this would involve two moves, one now, and one in the future when (and if) West Side was restored; besides, three-quarters of the school's students came from out-of-district. What if, when the school reopened, they (or their parents) chose not to come back? Bellmer insisted that this should be presented as an option to the faculty and staff, at a meeting scheduled for 8 a.m. the following morning. It was agreed to demolish the ruined portion of the school as quickly as possible, to spare students, visiting or returned, the sight of their school as a blackened ruin.

What had begun as calm, sunny Sunday, ended after a 14-hour workday of heavy equipment, oxygen packs, discarded water bottles and serial meetings, in darkness with, at the heart of the valley, a collection of shrunken buildings secured with yellow tape watched over by a security guard.

Physical and metaphysical damage control.

The meeting that was called for the following morning of faculty and staff, at 8 a.m.- the usual school starting time- would set the tone for all that would follow. It was to be held within sight of the remains of West Side School, in the newly restored Felta Schoolhouse, its nearby surviving ancestor.

“In my state of shock, disbelief, sorrow and panic at the work to be done,” says Principal/Superintendent Bellmer, “I kept reminding myself to keep focused on ‘school’, on returning services to our students first. I even wrote that on chart paper---students,

then parents/families, then the community. Rather than talk about replacing buildings and getting materials.”

It was important, to Bellmer, to compose no lists of what was lost. Rather to move forward as a group. “Grassroots, not top-down. We needed it more than ever.”

It began with the choice of whether to move to an alternate site, or to remain at the old one. After a presentation and full discussion of options, the vote was unanimous. “We realized that this is not just land. This spot here would be the thing that would see us through.”

Each day, starting at 8:00, they met in the schoolhouse to figure out the next important things to be done. Faculty and staff debriefed on where they were, and reported out by committees. “We also cried together, laughed a lot, and shared meals prepared by our families. That beautiful schoolhouse felt like a sanctuary to us, and played a huge role in our ability to function as a team.”

While the psychological/metaphysical/spiritual side of West Side School was being reconstituted, work on the physical damage to the site was already underway, in sometimes sloppy weather.

For years the school had made do by holding its fourth, fifth and sixth-grade classes in portable units with low ceilings and fluorescent light, which were scheduled to be replaced by the airy, windowed rooms of the new wing. Now, as the old units were converted into school offices, four additional portables were trucked in and installed in a row on what used to be center and right field of West Side’s baseball field.

“The portables were ugly at first, a mismatch,” says Chris Aldrich. “but then Rhonda (Bellmer) insisted that they be painted the same colors of the new wing.”

When, in one of many donations made to the stricken school, a family who ran a landscaping business asked what was needed, Bellmer suggested trees. Aided by the appropriately named Dr. and Mrs. Wood, a number of redwoods, native to the area, were installed at appropriate spots on what was gradually becoming a campus.

A raw space between the old school building and the new wing which had been chewed up rather badly during construction, turning during rains into a small lake, was now graded, paved and designated a play and assembly area. A separate area, for kindergarten, first and second grade, was fenced off next to the undamaged kindergarten building.

Workers from Belfor, the cleanup company, entered the smoke-damaged classrooms, removing whatever items were considered salvageable. After passing through a cleaning process involving ozone, that removed even the smell of smoke, the items, both instructional and personal, were boxed, labeled and delivered to the new wing classrooms.

Some of this work was accomplished in wet weather, and a considerable amount of it was done at night.

While faculty and staff continued to meet each morning, where they were addressed by counselors and participated in community-building exercises, the students were left to their own—and their parents’ ---devices. This meant a combination of day care, baby sitters, and perhaps too much television. “We’d only been back in school for 23 days

(since the opening of the new school year), observes Elizabeth Hoffman, first grade teacher. “Kids need routines.” Would children, especially the younger ones, regress? Lose their sense of being part of a group? “We all really needed to get back to the business of teaching and learning.”

Parental support was critical, people volunteering, getting supplies, asking “What can I do?”

On the Wednesday night after the fire, parents, faculty and staff gathered at Healdsburg’s Raven Theatre to see slides of the fire and share war stories, reflections and hopes in a kind of combination group therapy and renewal of commitment.

“The parents were feeding us every day at the Felta Schoolhouse during the reconstruction,” recalls Chris Aldrich. “Meals, coffee, I don’t know what we would have done otherwise.”

In the media, both print and broadcast, the story of the school’s ordeal and recovery became a subject of interest not only in Sonoma County but in the Bay Area, with the appearance of a TV location truck as familiar outside the school as a bulldozer or a backhoe. There was a widespread emotional, intellectual and financial investment in a successful outcome.

“It turned out we had more support than I ever imagined---staff, parents, board,” says Bellmer, who had also concocted a slogan, expanding the three Rs to five: Respond>Recover> >Rebuild>Renew>Rejoice---West Side School. Fifth-grade teacher Lamiel Bjorkquist’s husband Bob made the recovery theme tangible with all-weather signs to be mounted outside the school. West Side had its war cry.

On Wednesday, October 17, ten days after the fire, teachers reported to their new classrooms to begin sorting through the transferred boxes of instructional and personal items and to begin setting up for business. “All our stuff from the old classroom was saved,” recalled Marge Wright, who was teaching second grade. “The Belfor people took everything out of every desk. Each kid’s stuff was put in a separate box---even one child’s stuffed animal that she’d had since birth.”

Not all the classes were so fortunate. “Our kids didn’t get any of their stuff back,” Susie Dalton said of her third-graders. “Stuff in cubbies, gym shoes, jackets.” There were, however, compensations. “Our toads, tarantulas and leaf bugs were saved.”

For Chris Aldrich, all that was salvaged from her fifth-grade classroom was one vase, originally white but now a scorched black-and-white, and one cup. “Our entire curriculum was gone. It really hit me the first day, when the Belfor people were asking teachers what they had left in their classrooms. They told me, ‘You don’t have anything’.” There was at least the prospect of moving into one of the permanent classrooms in the school’s new wing, a high-ceilinged room with wide windows overlooking the farm next door. “Being able to move into a new room helped. The space helped.”

“I love the new classroom. But I could teach in a tent if I had to.”

“It had become obvious,” observed School Board Member and parent Quincey Imhoff, “that this school was more than just a matter of bricks and mortar.”

The original target date for reopening the school had to be postponed “We had no power on Wednesday, the day school was supposed to reopen,” said first-grade’s Elizabeth Hoffman. “We had great piles of boxes, Belfor people coming in and out, the telephone guy, the roof leaked until it was fixed. It was a zoo.

“Some of the Belfor people helped me move back in, Linda Cervantes, Lisa Phipps, a few parents. They put things up on the walls, sharpened pencils, put up contact paper. Some woman who’d had kids here just showed up, went to work, putting things into plastic blocks. Susan Buck (a school Board member) worked with our little reader books, went through and organized everything, kid by kid, painstaking work.”

By Friday the 19th, twelve days after the fire, the school was ready to re-open.

Stronger at the Breaks.

At eight o’clock Friday morning, in a steady rain, a bus and dozens of cars returned students to a school whose entire physical configuration had changed. West Side School now resembled a reversed letter C, with a row of portable classrooms at one end, and a pair of portable offices at the other, joined by the new wing, with the kindergarten and secretary’s office off in a separate corner. There was a new entrance, with the Respond>Recover>Rebuild>Renew> Rejoice> sign next to it, new play space, new bathrooms, new drinking fountains. New light poured through the empty space where the old buildings had been demolished. Teachers and students would be meeting in what amounted to a new school at the same address.

In a hushed, almost reverent atmosphere with a certain tentativeness about, kids began to get the feel of their new surroundings. Class by class, some students were led around

the dramatically changed site by their teachers, while others sorted through boxes of their personal belongings in new, unfamiliar classrooms.

“The kids’ initial response to the new surroundings was a mixture of bravado and insecurity,” said Marge Wright. “Jumping on the ramps, loud talk. Their bodies showed it.”

“At first, the third grade kids coming back were excited by the novelty of a new place,” said Susie Dalton, “‘This is awesome!’. There was a lot of frenetic energy. Then they calmed down. Began working as a group again.”

“Kids said, ‘I like our new classroom,’” observed Elizabeth Hoffman. “Kids who had been through family trauma, like a divorce, had some reoccurrence of old emotions. They needed approval. Some routines needed to be re-established. As regular classes started, and the week went on, it got progressively better.”

“Some parents asked how long it would be until the school is restored to its former condition” said Marge Wright. “The kids hadn’t asked. We told them it will be this way until Spring.

“No kids have been lost from this class. In fact the school gained one student. A sibling of one of our class students.”

“The memory of it still comes in waves,” said Chris Aldrich. “Kids came back, began to talk about it, started to cry.”

“My big task now,” said Marge Wright, “is to open up boxes and go through papers. I have mixed feelings about getting everything back. I have to replace things that are so great for kids. It’s all here, but I just have to find it. That’s the flip side. I’m grateful, but also challenged.”

On Monday, the first full day of school, the reconfigured play space was bursting with schoolyard ebullience: kids ran, kicked and threw balls, yelled to one another. The following day, children were chalking hopscotch squares on the new schoolyard asphalt, reclaiming their turf while driving away adjustment problems. Kid resilience showing the way, like, in poet Gary Snyder's phrase, "little Zen masters."

Outside Chris Aldrich's classroom in the new wing, there was a line of flags from the fifth grade's annual overnight trip to the sailing ship *Balclutha* in San Francisco. The flags had been won in a raffle by a school parent, who donated them back to the fifth grade, all of whose belongings had been lost in the fire.

"This has been a good life lesson," Aldrich said. "Everybody has to deal with hard spots in life, you're in shock, in pain, but you weather it. You move on."

As with human bones, shattered by a break, West Side School has begun to knit into a new bond, its elements, the school students, faculty and staff, parents, the school board, and a community that is both wider and deeper than before. And, as with healthy, restored bone, tempered by its ordeal, West Side is certain to be stronger at the breaks.

On March 19, 2010, West Side School, half destroyed by an electrical fire in October of 2007, and restored by a remarkable community effort, was rededicated in an outdoor ceremony at the School.

Honored at the ceremony were representatives of the firefighters, cleanup organizations, insurers, builders, financial donors, volunteers and members of the West

Side community who had begun reconstruction planning before the ashes had cooled, and continued working right up to the rededication date.

In the presence of the West Side student body, faculty and staff, the honorees were presented with individual awards in the form of framed artwork by West Side students. The awards were presented by individual students. It was a special moment in the life of the school, new life arising from the ashes of a disastrous fire, a fulfillment of West Side's post-fire pledge to the Five Rs: Respond>Recover> Rebuild> Renew>Rejoice. Along with the rejoicing, West Side had added a sixth R: Remember, symbolized by a quilt created by West Side alum Caroline Hock, with a figure of a phoenix, the mythical bird that arises from its own ashes. The quilt now hangs in the replaced Felta Hall, now renamed in honor of West Side's recovery, Phoenix Hall.

The West Side campus is back in business now, with its rebuilt classrooms, hall and library, its restored playfield and basketball courts giving it the solid, purposeful air of a well-maintained community college, committed to the continuing purpose of serving the future of the area by offering the best education possible to its children.

What could have been West Side's darkest hour has been transformed into a significant and lasting achievement. Something to Remember, with pride.

-John van der Zee

A Place Called West Side, a Beginning Look Back, Healdsburg, West Side School, 1996

van der Zee, John, own notes from conversations with Cyril “Dutch” King, Gene Thompson, Len Echols, Royce Meyerott, Bobi Peters. .

Interviews

Bob Lownes, Sr., Bob Lownes, Jr., Tim Harrington, Gay Kenny, Richard Bugarske, Elizabeth Schmidt, Maggie Ross.