

Why I Give to Lansdowne Friends School
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Over a year ago, I was asked to write a few words on why I give each year to Lansdowne Friends School (LFS), where I graduated from 6th grade in 1974. I wanted to provide an answer then, but I wasn't able to find the words to summarize my reasons. I'm just busy, I thought; all I have to do is sit down and spend some time on the assignment. In retrospect, the reasons were more complex, and the answer I give today is far more important to me than anything I would have said in late 2014 or early 2015.

I give to LFS because of how much I learned there. In an age of internet tutorials and viral social media videos, it's hard to remember a time when "self-paced learning" was a novelty or innovation. I was encouraged to explore a variety of unique gifts, and those gifts became more celebrated and expanded over time. I was free to read through the entire "reading box," and practice math problems, and write a report about Australia (when I found out that I loved drawing the outline of the continent freehand), and continue to be encouraged by a community that saw promise and excitement, rather than just an inconvenient distraction from the standard lesson.

I give to LFS because of the community that educated me. In Spring of 2015, I had a wonderful conversation with my former Teacher Sandy that has buoyed me ever since. She was kind, and reminiscent, and spoke of how delighted (and challenged) teachers and students were to have someone like me in the school—not despite my differences, but tied closely to my unusual complexity. Imagine my surprise a few months later, in October, when a woman excitedly ran up to me in a hotel lobby in Los Angeles and asked my name. It was one of my classmates, Deanna McRae, who recognized me and wanted to greet me and introduce me to her friends and colleagues. There were only 13 of us in Teacher Dot's 6th grade class, but after 40 years, there was still a desire to connect and share. My parents sent me to LFS because the community in Lansdowne knew it to be a special place that would support and encourage me. (My father worked as a car salesman at Marv Pollow Chevrolet, around the corner at Lansdowne and Union—I think Mr. Pollow was one of the first advocates of me going there. My mother became a playground monitor, even after I had graduated from LFS and moved on to middle and high school.)

I give to LFS because of the devotion to a special type of learning. During one of my more recent visits, I was struck by the reference to "SPICES" in the kindergarten room. Teaching a 5- or 6- year old about simplicity and integrity and community isn't about dogma or a stringent code for how one spends one day a week. It's a sensitivity that pervades one's every day existence. If I had just learned these principles as a rote lesson, they would not have expanded throughout my thoughts and experiences and awareness of the world. Most kids who start in a Quaker elementary school with such principles don't end up being university engineering professors. But the principles that I learned play out daily in my life as an engineer and university professor.

I give to LFS because of the silence. I cannot ever sufficiently express my gratitude for my learning in the white Meetinghouse with the facing benches and the Peaceable Kingdom references. I learned to find balance, and my own center, in the weekly Meeting for Worship period. It was a big deal to start 2nd grade, with the knowledge that I was now old enough to "go to Meeting" like the bigger kids and the adults. Quaker Meeting was sacred and special then, and it's sacred to me now as a Friend. That center is part of my experience of the world, and how my complexity and gifts are able to come from a place of balance.

LFS remains an essential part of who I am, what I have become, and what it means to have one's special gifts noticed and nurtured. The School is in my heart, and my memory, and my will. How could I not give?