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Our Lady of Grace C.E.S. marks 60th anniversary this Sunday



By Brock Weir

Aurora resident Mary Jo Naburrs and her brother might have 19 years separating them, but beyond blood and a hometown, they have something else in common: Marg McDonald.

Ms. McDonald, says Mary Jo, is one teacher at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Elementary School all students remember and when Mary Jo's brother learned his little sister was taking a hand in organizing this weekend's celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the school, he sent her with a message.
?He said, ?he could lightheartedly apologise to Marg McDonald for causing her some grief.'?

Naturally, the big question then became what sort of grief they put her through and just how much was ?some?.

?He said it was, ?nothing too bad, but they would come and ask [my friends and me] to collect the rubber balls outside. So, we would gather them up and realise we could probably stretch this out a little bit longer. One of us would pretend to trip the other one in the hallway, the balls would go flying, the principal would come out and ask if everyone was okay.' He remembers he caused a little bit of grief and he wanted to apologise ever-so-lightheartedly.?

At the time the siblings roamed the halls of Our Lady of Grace, it was a one-storey strip of classrooms on Maple Street. In relatively short order, they outgrew that site, the building was razed, and the current school on Aurora Heights Drive was open to take students.

Over 30 years on, the new building could be awash with alumni like these having their own personal catharsis in making amends for childhood shenanigans but, more likely, it will be brimming over with memories shared by current and former students and current and former staff alike.

?[When I became involved] I started thinking back to the time I was here,? says Mary Jo. ?I can remember every single teacher I had, but I don't remember the principals ? which is probably a good thing because it meant I wasn't in there at all. I have this image of a super-long hallway, the playground on what is now the church parking lot, and the most wonderful thing I remember is the actual playground equipment. There were monkey bars and everything so we were allowed to climb up. I am sure there were dangers I was oblivious to at the time, and I have no idea how many head injuries occurred there, but all I remember is everybody loved it.?

And apparently, they all lived to tell the tale!

Over the years, Ms. Naburrs evolved from a student at Our Lady of Grace, to an OLG alumnus, to an OLG parent. It is a community in which she has always felt right at home and she, along with her fellow alums, and long-standing teachers have come together to help incumbent principal, Ines Donato, fill in the blanks of OLG history.

It is a history that has been coming to Ms. Donato fast and furious as Sunday's celebrations approach and shortly before The Auroran sat down with organizers, she received a box full of artefacts from a former member of the York Region District School Board ? including school calendars, workbooks, and a Life Magazine or two.

?We have a new Health & Phys Ed document that was published this year and we are just presenting it to our staff across the Board,? says Ms. Donato. ?As I was going through some of the things from the 60s, I saw some articles in The Globe and Mail and Life on sex education for little children in 1969. I thought history does repeat itself and what goes around comes around!

?Another thing that struck me is how the school has evolved and fluctuated. It is because of the demographics of the community and we serve the community. Depending on what the needs are, that is how the school has served.?

The community celebration marking the 60th Anniversary of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Elementary School gets underway Sunday, May 1, with a special mass at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church. The party shifts to the school itself at 3.30 p.m. with a formal ceremony, followed by the fun stuff ? including a barbeque from the Optimist Club of Aurora, the unveiling of a 60th anniversary Legacy Project, and rooms commemorating each decade of the school's existence.