

Lunchtime assistant immortalizes time at Aurora Senior P.S. in book



By Brock Weir

15 years ago, Aurora-based artist Deborah Campo was sitting at something of a crossroads.

Sitting alone one day in her living room, she thought, "God, if someone knocks on my door and offers me a job, I would take it."

Lo and behold, two days later, her friend Linda did exactly that, asking her to become a lunchtime assistant at Aurora Senior Public School. Ms. Campo says she had no hesitation in "keeping her pact with god", and it is a relationship which has endured ever since.

The end of the school year last week marked the end of Ms. Campo's time at Aurora Senior Public School as such. When it re-opens in September, merged with George Street Public School under the new name Wellington Public School, she hopes to continue her journey with the new school community.

In the meantime, however, she has created a lasting testament to the students, teachers and parents that have become part of the Aurora Senior tapestry in her new book "The Adventures of Miss Wally Wall."

Titled after the nickname given to her by students, Ms. Campo charts the adventures and misadventures of herself and the students as they have gone through life together, including the mutual exchange of lasting life lessons and the development of friendships that have endured long after the Grade 8 graduation.

"I've worked through all kinds of weather, I have cared for all the students, some who stayed for a brief time, some with learning disabilities, some with gifted abilities, and a few students I knew from kindergarten through graduation at Grade 8," Ms. Campo explains. "Each year, I shed a few tears when I realise Grade 8 students would soon begin a new journey in their educational lives and I wish them great success."

"On some occasions, I do run into them and they tell me what they are doing in the world now. Most have gone onto colleges and universities, or are graduating from Grade 12 this year. Whatever happens, they were a part of my life and, I guess, each day at school I was part of theirs. My favourite moments were when those lost students who were struggling or, at times, behaving badly, found their way and crossed paths with me in the summer with excited thoughts to tell me on how well they are doing now in their lives. I feel a sense that I am there for them to listen to when they are having a sad day. I am there to share in the happiness of their goals and aspirations and we have a lot of fun."

?The Adventures of Miss Wally Wall? shares a series of colourful anecdotes in the lives of the students, from ?Wesley and the Dead Body Part? to ?The Poo Finale?, involving a truth-or-dare session Ms. Campo became involved with which culminated in a daring effort to extricate a bag of?excrement from a nearby tree. We won't spoil the results.

?Sometimes I go home and question if I have done as much as I possibly can, or look to see what I could have done better,? she says. ?I share that responsibility for their wellbeing and safety, but I try and speak to them and give them the respect they deserve and, hopefully they, in turn, will do the same towards me. I think parents will find these stories delightful and humourous. A lot of them know me already and over the years I have met so many students. In my dedication I basically say you have all touched my life in so many ways I can't thank you enough for inspiring me to become a better person and create this book based on so many cherished memories I have made with you all. This is a labour of love.?

The Adventures of Miss Wally Wall can be found at online retailers such as Amazon. Meet Ms. Campo this Saturday at the Aurora Farmers' Market, as Ms. Campo coordinates ?Art in the Park? from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Town Park in conjunction with the Market and Kerry's Place Autism Services.