

(Summer 2009)

What is your Ellison story?

I believe in stories and in their power to connect us to one another. Author Tim O'Brien wrote about the power of stories, ". . . the remembering makes it now. And sometimes remembering will lead to a story, which makes it forever. That's what stories are for. Stories are for joining the past to the future." My Ellison story is about people I love dearly- people who have shaped me, taught me, encouraged me, and grounded me. When people who are unfamiliar with our school ask about it, I often begin by saying, "All the best people in my life are Ellison people".

When I think back to my own history with Ellison, I'm heartened (and a bit startled) to recall just how far back it stretches. As a persecuted fifth grader in 1979, my family moved from Alabama to New Jersey. The horror! My father had taken a job with Scott Paper, so we tucked away our drawls and our y'alls (which occasionally still emerge- apologies!) and relocated to southern New Jersey. As a painfully shy fifth grader, the change was incredibly difficult. Ellison, at the time extended only to fifth grade, and my parents decided not to place me at Ellison as it would force yet another school move the following year. My younger brother and sister were enrolled however, and thus began my association with the little school that has been a vast part of my life for thirty years.

As a twelve year old, I formed memories and stories of the little school building that extended only as far as the water fountain outside the kindergarten doorway. Mr. Owen (the then-Head of School) lived in the house that stood where we all park today and his children would run back and forth, from school to home throughout the day. I remember too my best friend and I taking SAT prep classes in what is now Mrs. Smith's old room; you can easily imagine our sulky, indignant faces as we revisited percentages and pi during our summer vacation. VIP Day was held in the now unused, basement of the school. I don't think you've lived until you have experienced VIP Day or a talent show with fifty parents and friends crammed into the Ellison basement watching fifth grade girls do a self-choreographed butterfly dance. The Ellison Fair was the biggest annual event for many years, and I painted streams of grimy, little faces as a teenage volunteer on those occasions. Another story that I treasure is applying for a job at Ellison and being told by Mr. Owen, that as part of my application process, I would have to prepare and teach a lesson to the students. To add injury to insult- it would have to be a math lesson! Ms. Hynes would likely not have been impressed with me, but I muddled through and was offered the job that formalized my relationship with the school.

We all have our own Ellison stories, and regardless of their age, whether they are serious or frivolous, they are poignant. I have former students from Ellison who often call and visit, and I never tire of hearing their stories of years spent with teachers and friends. They appreciate what they take from the school, and I cherish what they leave us.

Like these students, no one with an Ellison story can deny that at the core. . . a teacher lives. The collective Ellison story is built on the devotion, the toil, the expertise, and the love of the teachers who work here. From 1959 to today, Ellison's teachers nurture sustain the academic and personal excellence that our students achieve. I hope that when you consider your Ellison story, you will recognize the tangible presence of the teachers who allowed the story to be written.

I invite you to share your Ellison story and to ask someone else about theirs. I am confident that you will be inspired and touched. I hope you will share them with each other, with our remarkable teachers, with me, or with anyone who understands what has existed for fifty years. By sharing our memories we can go far in keeping Ellison's remarkable history alive. I consider it a great privilege to be a small part of your Ellison story, and together we can be diligent stewards of the stories that now span a half-century and tell a tale of remarkable achievement. What is your Ellison story?