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A Beautiful Place

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FAMILY TIES

A Beautiful Place

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

A Sunday morning staple at our house is a program that ends with a segment capturing the natural sounds and beauty of nature someplace in our country. Recently, as that segment aired, I turned to my husband and said, “Laurelwood is one of the most beautiful places on earth in my book.” He agreed.

While no longer a part of the denominational secondary educational system, it is the boarding high school I attended for three years. Not far from Portland, Oregon, Laurelwood Academy is nestled in a beautiful little valley that looks much the same as it did when I graduated (50 years ago this spring). Whenever I return, I soak in the beauty of the place and recall many of my happiest teen memories.



sweet roll, apple and carton of milk didn't generally last until morning. It is where I became a reader for another Bible teacher; and in the process of grading papers and talking with him, I learned much about faith, grace and redemption. I was nurtured by his wife as well. I have been forever grateful. Boarding academy is where I

was in a safe environment but experienced an independence that I relished.

I went to Laurelwood Academy because of the generous support of a member of the Bend (Oregon) Church. When I arrived, I knew only one student—Herb. He might as well have been home in Bend, as we weren't allowed to talk with boys for longer than two minutes, nor could we walk on the same sidewalk. My first roommates were sisters, one in her late 20s and the other the same age as my parents. I wasn't even a Seventh-day Adventist, although my parents had recently begun attending church. Talk about culture shock!

Was it a perfect place? No. Were all the rules fair and reasonable? I didn't think so.

After the first few awkward days, I began to feel more at home. Patsy, who delivered our clean clothes and linens from the laundry, lived down the hall and learned who my strange roommates were. She asked me to move in with her. Cheryl, my Bible teacher's reader, quickly noted that I knew next to nothing about the New Testament. She took me under her wing, explaining some basics that helped me begin to be more comfortable and successful in class. In no time I made friendships that I hold dear to this day.

Did the academics prepare me for college? Yes! Were faculty and staff caring? Yes, inside and outside the classroom. Perhaps my best lessons were learned out of the classroom. While my most poignant memories are from establishing friendships that span decades, my life was enriched and my world expanded by the ebb and flow while living among others my own age with the guidance of the adults on our campus. Having lived and taught on boarding school campuses for 13 years with my husband, I've also seen the challenges and benefits from the other side.

My boarding school experience was an adventure that I wouldn't trade for anything! Opportunities to grow into leadership positions were a part of that. It is where I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It's where I adjusted to a brown paper bag for Sabbath morning breakfast. The

Residential schools have been an important part of Adventist education for more than 120 years. Without question, these schools have positively shaped the course of the Church. There are voices today who question the validity of boarding schools and those who don't consider it safe or worthwhile to “send” a child away to school. From my perspective, the boarding academy experience offers the same advantages I received, and I rest assured that God's blessings are evident in the diversity of our Adventist educational opportunities.

Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and a licensed marriage and family therapist.