

The real future of Andrews

My fingers struggled to fit around the fat blue pencil. Teacher announced, "Write the letter D, students." Biting my bottom lip, I glanced at the huge alphabet lining the wall. Which one was D? I stared at the blank paper on my little green desk. My feet curled around the metal legs of the mustard-yellow chair. I remembered when Daddy came for parent-teacher conferences and tried to sit on my yellow chair. With his knees nearly touching his chin, he was relieved when Teacher offered him a big people's chair. Too bad Daddy wasn't here now to help me find D.

Remember those elementary-school days? When school meant lunch pails, handwriting class, and recess time? It didn't mean thinking about how many credits to take, if financial aid was a problem this quarter, or when to fit in a work schedule. In elementary school, the word college meant a place where my big sister lived.

But to the children of Ruth Murdoch Elementary School, not even a mile down the street from the Andrews campus, college may play a larger role in their lives than it did in mine because it's closer to home. Perhaps these children aren't worrying yet about those credits or financial aid, but Andrews University impacts them, and soon they will impact Andrews because these kids are the future.

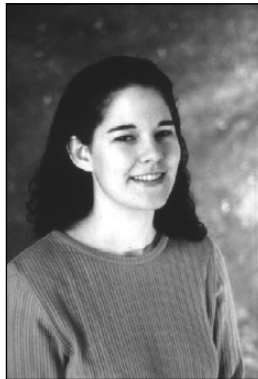
I decided to go on a tour of RMES, to see the future for myself. On a cold winter morning, I entered the kindergarten room, shrugging off my heavy coat. I couldn't wait to see the youngsters, but I didn't find students sitting around in their desks practicing their numbers. Instead, I noticed several children preparing for recess outside. Then I noted oddly that many of the youngsters appeared too large to fit into the miniature classroom chairs. I soon found out why.

"Here, let me help you button it." A boy half my size said as he bent down to aid a kindergartner half his size into a yellow and black parka. The younger boy could hardly stand still. "I've never been outside with my buddy before," he exclaimed, his dark eyes filled with excitement.

"Don't forget to put your hood on," the older child said, leading the way out a back door and onto a snow-covered playground.

These older students, fifth-graders who were too large for the toy-sized chairs, take on the responsibility of being buddies to the kindergartners. Ten-year-old girls take the hands of girls half their age and share their recess time together. Recently, the kindergartners painted pictures and their fifth-grade buddies wrote stories to go with the paintings. These activities build friendships so the kids can learn from each other.

As I wandered from classroom to gymnasium, to computer lab, to music room, I discovered the children of Ruth Murdoch. In the hallway, a group of students lined up quietly against the mint-green wall. When I visited the first-graders, a child browsed through a bookshelf, deciding which animal story to read. The fourth-grade kids sat at computers, typing busily before the teacher called, "Time's up." In the gym, a mob of spirited sixth-graders burned energy in a game of capture-the-flag. Down the hall, the third-grade choir practiced "We Are Bookworms," preparing for their spring concert.



I decided to see the future for myself

After completing my tour, I sat down on a blue chair outside the principal's office. Nostalgia struck, and I remembered my own days in grade school. Yes, we had choir and capture-the-flag and animal storybooks to read. We had lunchtime and math class and alphabets on the walls. And I didn't know it then, but my education was preparing me to become a part of Andrews University.

In the same way, many of the students at RMES will travel down the road to Andrews Academy, turn the corner, and encounter the campus of Andrews University.

As my eyes wandered around the hall one last time, I caught sight of a sign, one I'd seen in many of the classrooms as well. It said, "At Ruth Murdoch, I am part of a family of learners growing closer to Jesus every day. I want to be like Jesus by doing my best, respecting others and sharing His love while waiting for Him to return." What a great motto for RMES students—an important part of the future of Andrews University.

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