

Child's Way: Challenges of a Small Rural School

It was 1990 when we had our first experience with a terrible fire! Right here in this beautiful Dorena valley. We had just bought the old Culp Creek school and spent 6 weeks renovating it. That summer, the only day we left the area was when we went to Salem to check out with the state what we could do as far as a school was concerned.

When we were coming home, within a mile of our home we saw fire trucks and Rosemary Bird hosing down the roof of the old post office.

As we inched our way past those who were fighting the fire at the old Bohemia mill, we were greeted by neighbors who said the new roof we'd put on the school saved the valley.

Pizza sized embers filled the school yard. There were hot spots here and there and evidence that people worked hard to keep any of our personal things from burning up. Like the ring of burned grass around our boat and motor home, but both were unharmed.

We also know we had angels because at the base of a tree on the far side of the gym, where no one could have known there was a flame, there was a ring of burned grass, but the flames were put out miraculously, without the aid of any human.

We had been sleeping in the school that summer. An official came by and told us to rest with assurance that there would be no concern of smoke inside the school and they would keep watch through the night around the school grounds.

That day, people from the U of O acted fast and put out a couple small fires in neighboring yards on either side of the school. What could've turned into a lifetime horror movie for the folks upriver it marked the end of an Era.

The Bohemia Mill Fire terminated the lumber work done here locally, but it didn't destroy lives or homes of this community. Partly due to the responding professional firemen that came to our aid and in large part due to caring strangers and local folks!

We've witnessed a few other fires over the past 30 years. ALWAYS hard to see someone watching their home burn down! I think we've seen three with our own eyes, but know of others and felt the threat when fires started up near Wildwood at least twice. And more recently, the fire down near Dorena School and those neighbors losses.

We have an incredible community up here! People pay attention and watch out for one another! People care about the good of the whole!

We started a school up here in 1991. We've had school in the old Culp Creek School ever since. We just celebrated our 19th Charter School graduation. We currently have 80 students enrolled in the school and have a staff of 18.



In May, just a few weeks ago, we were informed by our insurance company that they would NOT renew our policy. They had covered us for 30 years. The reason? **We are in an unprotected fire district. Without a Fire District, not sure if we'll be able to have fire insurance again!**

Our school has changed hundreds of lives! Literally. Not just students, but their families. Over the years, students have come from as far away as Yoncalla, Drain, Springfield, Eugene, and Creswell. There's always been a few from up-river here as well. The majority come from Cottage Grove.

The school is a life-giving place for students and staff alike!

We cannot imagine closing Child's Way. Too many people's lives could be hugely affected. We are willing to risk everything to keep providing this learning place! The actual and ripple effect of losing our school to fire would be unthinkable! In our current, uninsured, status, we would not be able to rebuild the school. It would be the end of Child's Way as we know it. With our staff of 18 it would be a great loss of employment. **The loss for our community, our students and their families would be incalculable.** Well beyond the monetary loss!

To go without fire insurance is a huge risk! What a tragedy it would be to lose either of our schools. What a tragedy it would be to lose any more homes.

We support forming the Row River Fire District and know that a local department with fire engines, well equipped and trained volunteers will be on the ready in the event of a fire. We want to be able to tell neighbors our students, and insurance companies that we are protected. **We want to know that everyone who lives in this valley is safe!**

Let us stand strong as a community! Please donate to help operational funding. You can donate at the table by the door or one of our volunteers.

