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## Laurel Walker | In My Opinion

### School's footprint can't be missed



**Laurel Walker**

**Maggie Lombardi, 10, looks over her “footprint” of memories at Randall Elementary in Waukesha. Looking on is her mother, Kris (left) and Principal Bonnie Schlais.**

Posted: April 30, 2010 | [\(0\) Comments](#)

If someone asked you for a memory from elementary school, what would come to mind?

Fourth-grader Maggie Lombardi remembers way back to first grade at Randall Elementary School in Waukesha. PJ Day. Popcorn and reading. She got to bring a blanket and a stuffed animal and watch "Finding Nemo." Even her teacher wore pajamas.

"It was super cool," she wrote.

Maggie's dad, Jim Lombardi, an electrical engineer who attended the same school between 1969 and 1976, has memories, too, if a bit more vague. Happiness. A great learning experience from great teachers. Fun times with friends.

He still stays in touch with some of those friends who've settled in the same diverse neighborhood around Carroll University. Now his kids go to school with some of their kids, he wrote.

Maggie's grandmother, former Waukesha mayor Carol Lombardi, walked the same hallways as a student in the early 1940s.

"I was a very good student, and usually the teacher's pet," she said. "I got to ring the bell in the morning. I got to answer the school phone. A lot of the kids hated me because I was doing all those things, but I learned so much responsibility."

Yet another generation remembers. Carol Lombardi's fourth-grade teacher way back then was Betty Knoebel, now 87 and still living in Waukesha.

She was a young, 20-year-old teacher at Randall, on her first assignment in a 56-year teaching career in the school district. She remembers how mothers waited outside the school for their kids at lunchtime so they could walk home for the noontime meal. No hot lunch, or bag lunches, for that matter. If a mom couldn't make it, she'd call school and a teacher might take the child home for a meal.

Every teacher taught everything. Knoebel remembers teaching physical education in a gymnasium with "a great big pole in the middle of it that I think held up the school." She taught around the pole.

There were no buses; everyone walked. The school library was lacking, so every other week she'd walk her students to the city library a few blocks away where they'd check out books.

"*That* was a neighborhood school," she said.

Sometimes you can hear footsteps of change creep up on you. At Randall School these days, you can literally see the footprints.

Principal Bonnie Schlais, in her 20th year at Randall, explained. In some educational lingo, a school's "footprint" is its attendance area, from where students are drawn. But Randall Elementary School, neighborhood school, is about to become the Randall STEM Academy - a charter school specializing in science, technology, engineering and math - next year.

Schlais said a district administrator kept saying during planning stages that Randall would lose its "footprint" because it will draw students from all over the district.

"We *wanted* to leave our footprints," Schlais said.

The parent council picked up on the idea and, with help from Kris Lombardi, Maggie's mom, the school's been asking students and teachers - past and present - to record their memories on footprints that will be shared and preserved at a May 20 community ceremony from 6 to 8 p.m.

Next year, the principal and most teachers will be new to match the changing, specialized curriculum. Current Randall students can still attend, and Maggie Lombardi, who likes technology, will be back for fifth grade. But much of the student body will change.

Traditions may end - like a student council that works with residents of The Caring Place respite center or visitors from a senior living complex who read to the Randall students, or "Quarters for College" in which students not only contribute quarters but pretty much run a scholarship program for nearby South High School students.

Maybe some things will stay - like the close working relationship with Carroll University next door, which has allowed college students to provide after-school tutoring.

No wonder the change is being met with mixed emotions - sadness for a loss, excitement for new possibilities, anxiety about the unknown.

Chris Meyer has been a school secretary at Randall for 30 years and a district employee for 40. She's become the school historian, preparing posters every year with pictures of the school year highlights on each one.

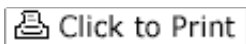
From her spot behind the school office counter, even she is uncertain where she'll be next year. But this much she knows. The essence of Randall has not changed because the children are all still wonderful, she said.

The pitter-patter of small feet makes for some great footprints.

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