

My Memoirs - Elementary School and the New Neighborhood - Chapter 1.4

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I did well in school, testing high on the various aptitude tests and joining the gifted and talented program with the other "smart kids." I also fell in love with my second grade teacher. Miss Holbrook was not only much nicer than Mrs. Simson; she was also young and pretty. In fact I did so well under her tutelage that it was decided I should skip the second half of second grade. I felt flattered, but I wasn't happy about leaving Miss Holbrook, who by then was 'Mrs.' somebody, but I've blocked that out. Life was still good.

In third grade, Miss Rockwell was another battle ax, tall and slender with her hair braided severely and piled on top of her head. But at least she stuck to the three R's. The problem was that I skipped the part of second grade where you learn your multiplication tables, and my confidence in arithmetic was permanently harmed. That's my excuse for never doing well in math, and I'm sticking to it! Miss Rockwell remained my teacher for fourth grade, then on to Ms. Findley in fifth.

My family moved from Echo Park to our new neighborhood around the time I finished the fifth grade. The transition wasn't easy for me. My new home was roomier, but there was no wilderness across the street, no hills, no good climbing trees, and no dog. Beauty had died a year earlier. I only knew one person in my new school, Beth Auerbach, and she was a girl!



The new neighborhood, Fairfax, was nearly all Jewish. That was OK, except that unlike me, all the kids went to Hebrew school to prepare for their Bar Mitzvah, so there was no one to play ball with after school finished. Although I was still a good student I struggled to adjust. When Little League started, I faced another rude awakening. I was always big and strong for my age, so at Echo Park the coach thought I had serious talent. I became the starting pitcher. Now I was the new kid and some of the other boys had started to catch up to me in height and strength. The coach shrugged at my pitching arm, and I found myself relegated to right field.

Things got a little better when I entered Bancroft Junior High. I had made a few pals by then and was joined by my old friend David Elson, together with Beth. David and Beth's moms were high school pals with my mother and had children around the same time, after WWII ended. Our families often vacationed with each other in Ensenada, a five hour drive south from L.A. That is where I learned to love fishing and got my first guitar. David and I were already performing together in by time were 12.



In Summer, we went to Camp JCA, the not-too-religious Jewish summer camp in the San Bernardino Mountains. It was there that I was first introduced to the rudiments of the Jewish religious tradition: singing the "hamotzi" prayer before meals, attending Friday evening Shabbat services, learning Israeli folk dances, and lots of singing around the flagpole each morning. It was also at JCA that I developed my confidence in leading songs with my guitar.