

PREFACE

When I started teaching 4th grade in 1968, I was given a stack of textbooks, a schoolroom that looked exactly the same as the rooms where I attended school in the 1950's, and 25 adorable little kids who looked and acted much like I did when I was their age living in the same suburban town in California. I was fresh out of college – having packed a 4-year degree into 3 1/2 years so I could start teaching in January. Life was good and I knew what I was doing.

I'll never forget the feeling of surprise and delight when my first paycheck arrived. Just over \$600 for living a dream that I had had since I was 10 years old! It all seemed so easy, so fun, and so very, *very* NATURAL. It was what I had always wanted to do with my life and I've never forgotten the fun of those first few years.

It's amazing to me now that a half century later – even after having been retired for over 20 years – I feel comfortable writing about teaching as “easy, fun, and very, very natural.” That was not my experience during most of the 30 years I spent in the classroom. The stress of being in education built steadily during those years and at times became unbearable.

There is no point for me to try to describe what happened to education in this country during the past four decades. My generation, “The Baby Boomers,” entered the arena of education full of energy, idealism, and dreams for the future. Too much has already been written about what changed all that, and when I let myself become mired there, I feel like I lose my center - my natural optimism - and my own hope for the future.

The intent of this book is to tell a story that might help bring some balance back into classroom teaching. I believe that what's happening in education right now, while creating a great deal of stress, is not only inevitable – but is the natural unfolding of a process that will take the next generation of leaders to exactly where they need to be.