

Mildred Arlington

It was a warm spring day and the students couldn't wait to get outside and enjoy the afternoon. As the students played games, sat at the picnic table and drew and talked I noticed one student staring up at the school building very intently. As I approached her she said "Do you see the kids looking out the window," As I looked up I did not see anyone. The student who was looking up was an intelligent senior who had set many goals for her life and was not one who made up stories for attention. She was serious about life and all the things that it involved. As I stood next to her she started to describe the kids she saw. They were young around 9-10 there were boys and girls and they all were looking out the window with an expression of excitement and longing. They seemed to be looking for someone or something.

I tried to explain to the student that there was no one left in the school and she knew all the students were high school age. I told her that I would check inside to see if there were visitors to the school. I realized there were no visitors at the school and either she had dreamed the image of the kids or she was seeing something that wasn't there. Since I knew the strength of this student I felt compelled to do some investigation about what she saw.

The building we were in was an old elementary school built in the 1920's. It had been vacant for about 10 years and the company I worked for had been asked if they would open an alternative high school program for "at risk" students. The building contained 4 separate classrooms, a library, a basement kitchen and office

space and workrooms. The classrooms were large with 2 on the first floor and 2 on the second floor.

The room that I had on the second floor was designed a bit different than the room across the way. My room had an extension moved out from the front wall about 4 feet where the green boards were mounted. The exact size room across the way did not have this extension from the wall where the green boards were mounted.

I often wondered about this but just felt it had to do with old buildings being designed differently to suit needs at different times. Curiosity got the better of me so I decided to do some investigation as to why the wall in my room was extended out.

I discovered that the school had suffered a fire back in the spring of 1928. At that time there were no fire escapes from the upstairs classrooms nor were there any fire alarms. It seems the fire started in the basement in the janitors room after he had left the building. The kitchen staff was also gone so there was no one in the basement of the school. As most elementary schools the kids went outside on warm days by grade level. The first and second grades from the first floor were first out, the 3rd and 4th grade were upstairs and would be next to leave.

The teacher for the 4th grade Mrs. Arlington was the typical old school elementary teacher and the students knew to follow her directions.

As the students anticipated going outside their level of excitement was getting high. They heard the 3rd grade class leave and knew they were next. Mrs.

Arlington told them to line up and the students left their desks and lined up by the

blackboards in alphabetical order- they knew this drill all too well. Mrs. Arlington went to the door and when she opened it she smelled and saw smoke. She closed the door and told the students to sit down in front of the blackboards in their places and she would be right back. The students knew the drill and did as they were told. What no one knew was that when she had opened the door it created an updraft and the fire soon spread up the staircase- The kids and staff outside were too busy to notice the smoke and were busy playing. Mrs. Arlington left the room and the students in their places. As she started down the staircase she became consumed by smoke and fell. The students who were trained to obey their teacher's wishes sat and waited.

The fire department was finally summoned and arrived, as they headed into the building they went up stairs, they found Mrs. Arlington on the first floor landing as they opened the classroom the smoke had filled the room and all the students were in their places on the floor by the blackboard just as she had told them. They sat and were waiting for her.

My student who had said she saw the kids upstairs looking out the window saw the kids from that day. They had heard kids playing outside, ran to the window and were waiting for Mrs. Arlington to come and let them out. The wall in my room was to cover up the site where the students were waiting. The school was named the Arlington school after the teacher. The students were waiting for her to let them into the light. After finding out these facts I waited for the students to leave one day and pried part of the wall open, in the hope that the spirit of the students

would come out and go into the light and find their teacher who loves them and has been waiting for them and they can play in the sunshine.