

## **“Echoes of the Heart”**

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**Back to school.** Every summer about this time, I’m in disbelief that school is once again about ready to resume. Always, it seems too soon. At the same time, I can imagine the relief of parents across the board. After all, finding constructive ways of occupying our children and youth in the days of summer is a steep challenge.

How times have changed. In my *boomer generation* days of youth, we used to self-entertain. I might have spent a few weeks at camp over the years but, mostly, we organized our own days and the activities that filled them. And we were never bored.

Transportation wasn’t a problem. In Aurora, Illinois, we rode our bicycles everywhere. From playground to playground, to the city swimming pool, to and from friend’s homes. It was a different era. Nowadays, communal trust runs shallow and most parents are more than a little compulsive about *literally* taking their children everywhere.

Gone are the days when children walk to and from the neighborhood school. What a shame! Those were some of the best of times, as harmless adventure and fun were never too far away.

My guess is that most children and youth are less than excited that the *back to school* doorbell is once again about to ring. After all, *back to school* brings change and, along with it, anxiety and uncertainty about what the new school year will bring.

What will our classroom situations be like? And our teachers? And there are always new classmates to sort out as students work out their circles of friendship and school day routines. The first week can be nerve-racking, as well as being a critical time of setting the tone for the rest of the quarter/ semester.

**New opportunities, new challenges.** On the plus side, however, *back to school* is an opportunity for a fresh start. Maybe fourth grade wasn’t such a good experience. But you’re in fifth grade, now, and it’s a new year. It’s a chance to develop new friendships, put forth a new attitude, and see where the spirit leads.

And what’s more, if you’re a fifth grader now, or an eighth grader, you’re in the most senior class on your school’s campus. You’ve got well-earned status and respect. You’re the envy of all the classes below you. This is your time to walk tall and build confidence for the challenging years ahead.

But most importantly, *back to school* is a new beginning, a time for a new challenge. If you happen to be changing schools, it’s an even bigger opportunity for a fresh start.

I changed schools (my old school was torn down and replaced by a shopping center) when I moved on to seventh grade. Not wanting to create any bad impressions in my

new school, I can remember turning over a number of new leaves as the school year began. Seventh grade was one of my best years ever. A new school, new friends, new teachers; everything was new and different and fun.

**New learning and a few inches taller.** *Back to school* is also an open door for new learning and personal growth. Every grade brings with it new expectations, as our K-12 education unfolds before us. But these unfoldings are important. Each year and stage helps prepare us for the next.

As we grow in reading comprehension and writing skills; as we move up the mathematics scale on to geometry, algebra and perhaps even calculus. As the sciences begin to blossom in our mind set and awareness. As we study civics and geography; as our minds are expanded by literature and history.

Every school year is a new day, a chance to build on previous learning, an opportunity to grow and evolve.

It's a chance, too, to grow socially. Our school days hold some of our best memories of our first relationships in life. Our first boyfriend or girl friend. And along with it, a growing awareness of who we are and of what we might want to do with our lives as we inch towards adulthood.

To all our children and youth, and to all their parents and families, a special word: *soak it up. Revel in the moment.* These are some of the best days of your lives. And trust me, they are fleeting and *soooo* short lived. So enjoy them and take time to breathe them in to your heart and spirit. It's *back to school*. Let the craziness and fun times begin!