

I lived in Bellingham with my parents from ages 3 to 5, on a small farm off Kelly Road. Unfortunately, my parents later split up and I divided time between them for most of the rest of my childhood.

I found myself living with mom in Milpitas, California in the early 1980s, in what we then (and many now still) called the "armpit of the Bay Area." In Milpitas I was pretty miserable, finding it hard to connect with kids who shared similar interests and feeling increasingly isolated.

By December of my 6th grade year, I really had to make a change. My dad had moved around the West for a few years, restless and looking for a place he felt at home. He found that place on Lummi Island right around 1980. I joined him over Christmas 1982, and finished out 6th grade at Beach School.

I was introduced to Patty Helm, the first teacher who ever really seemed to take a genuine interest in ME, my interests, and my goals. She could tell that I actually loved school and loved a challenge, and she cultivated that love and I soon found myself really enjoying this new environment.

Beach School was about as far (geographically and psychologically) from Milpitas as I could have moved, and I felt like I had landed in paradise as a pre-teen on Lummi Island. In school there were fun group assignments, spelling bees, team sports (my first introduction to soccer, which became a passion of mine now passed on to 2 of my children), and an awesome production of Peter Pan starring Warren Tyler, who has remained a dear friend of mine to this day. Many others also made an impression on me: Bobby, Aaron, Jake, Gene, Carrie, and Amber just to name a few.

We played all-island games of hide and seek on our bikes. We called it Manhunt. We explored Blizzard Road, Lover's Bluff, and the lake up in Scenic Estates. We felt safe on Lummi, and we had the confidence to explore our world.

I stayed on Lummi Island through the end of 8th grade, riding the bus in to Vista Middle School with my friends and navigating the challenges of being a teenager together. I felt like I was a part of something, really for the first time in my life.

I eventually moved back to California to finish out high school and the rest of my education. But Lummi Island, and in large part the remarkable and unique gem that is Beach School, never lost its hold on my heart. It is a rare and wonderful educational environment, a throwback to a different (some might say better) era of American education. My fond memories led me to seek employment here in Whatcom County after grad school, and I returned to a very special corner of America. As I write this email, I can look out over Bellingham Bay toward Lummi Island from my home and smile, remembering some of the best times of my life.

Best regards,
John MacGregor
Beach School 6th grade class of 1983