

—Slug:.....COMM-0844.opin.view.dennis
—Contributor.....Sophie Dennis
—Contributor email.....dscem@yahoo.com
—For section.....Voices/Viewpoint
—Format.....Opinions
—Dateline.....
—Article Number:.....42763

[REDACTED]

Notes from editor (not for publication):

Beautifully written. I'm so sorry for the delay in getting this into print. —Jeff

[REDACTED]

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 A town with no children?

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

2 As we in Marlboro look at the future of its school, we
3 must engage our heart as well as our head and think about the
4 existential questions related to place

#####END SUBHED#####

5 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

6 IMAGINE, if you will, a town with no children. What does
7 it look like? How does it feel? How does it sound? Would you
8 want to live there?

9 Here in Marlboro, we the voters are being asked to
10 seriously consider closing our local elementary school in favor of
11 sending — busing — our children elsewhere for their education.

12 On a practical level there are legitimate forces at play
13 causing us to consider this, and there are certainly important
14 issues to be discussed and logistical and budgetary questions to
15 be raised and pondered.

16 Indeed, there are informational meetings scheduled by
17 our school board for this very purpose, the first of three having
18 taken place on Nov. 20 and the next scheduled for Saturday, Dec.
19 13.

20 While I am, of course, interested in how my property
21 taxes may be affected by this change, my thoughts nonetheless go
22 first not to the details but to a larger question which often
23 preoccupies me: What is community? And, in this case, how
24 does our local elementary school fit into the broad concept of
25 community?

26 I do wonder: If we decide to cede the responsibility of
27 educating our own children within Marlboro — their home — to
28 another school in another town, what might the consequences be
29 for our town, its children, and any sense of community now and
30 in the future?

31 * * *

32 I DON'T KNOW the answers to the questions swirling
33 around in my head, but I do know that it is a momentous
34 decision because I suspect that if we choose to close our local
35 school, we will likely never have one here again. This makes the
36 decision facing Marlboro voters momentous and multi-
37 generation-affecting into the future.

38 I do wonder: If our kids leave Marlboro every day for
39 school, will their allegiance become bound to another place?
40 Their social, athletic and after-school lives will be elsewhere.
41 Their friends will be elsewhere. Birthday parties will be
42 elsewhere. Marlboro will become their bedroom community with
43 a commute every morning to another town, another community.

44 Does this matter?

45 I don't know, but I think about it. I worry that these
46 youngsters will not grow up with the kind of sense of place that
47 comes from being in school in your place.

48 And I wonder if lacking this connection to their town, to
49 their community, may make it easier to leave when the time
50 comes rather than choose to stay — or return — and raise their
51 own family here.

52 I wonder if, without a school in town, will families may
53 choose not to move to Marlboro? And, conversely, if we close the
54 school, will some families who have been living here choose to
55 move away, perhaps closer to the new school?

56 I wonder if children spend their days elsewhere, will they
57 still come to our local library to check out books?

58 I wonder if our only playground — the one at the school
59 — is closed, will our community ever experience the sights and
60 sounds of kids sliding and swinging joyfully in Marlboro again?

61 * * *

62 I THINK ABOUT the positive impact on our schoolchildren
63 over the years of the long tradition of community members
64 volunteering at the school. I wonder about the implications of
65 what its loss might mean for how our youngsters form of their
66 idea of community.

67 Parents and family members, as well as many others with
68 a simple passion for sharing their gifts and time with our children,
69 have consistently taken the opportunity to engage within our
70 classrooms while supporting the teachers and curriculum.

71 Countless generations of Marlboro kids have benefited as
72 Marlboro residents have shared their love of books, art,
73 architecture, history, and nature — among other passions — and I
74 wonder whether and how we could continue this tradition at
75 another school, in another town.

76 I wonder what education even is. Does it begin and end
77 with a teacher in a classroom? (If so, then presumably any
78 classroom anywhere will do.) Or could it be the case that the
79 education of children is situated within an environment, a milieu,

80 a sense of shared lived experiences in a place — in a town, in
81 Vermont, within America? In a community, their community, in
82 which they are surrounded by and engaged with many others
83 calling that place home, too?

84 There is a case to be made that including our town's
85 children in a larger learning environment may provide increased
86 opportunities. As an educator, I don't discount this argument, and
87 the School Board is providing important data on costs and
88 benefits of staying or going.

89 But I believe that we must engage our heart as well as
90 our head to think about the existential questions related to place
91 as we also mull over the practical details.

92 Marlboro residents have a rare opportunity with this vote
93 to think about what kind of town we wish to live in — and to
94 leave for future generations. Power increases when we engage
95 together in community and is dispersed when people are
96 dispersed.

97 So, I ponder: What is a town without a school? What
98 makes a town a town?

99 Is it just a bunch of houses, or is it something more?

100 And, if we do close our school, will we become a town
101 with no children?

#####END TEXT#####

BIO/COATTAIL:

#####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL#####

102 **SOPHIE L. DENNIS** is a retired associate professor of
103 education at Landmark College in Putney.

#####END BIO/COATTAIL#####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

#####BEGIN MAXISSUE#####

104 0

#####END MAXISSUE#####

LINKS:

#####BEGIN LINKS#####

105

#####END LINKS#####

VIDEO:

#####BEGIN VIDEO#####

106

#####END VIDEO#####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

#####BEGIN LOGLINE#####

107

#####END LOGLINE#####