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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

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

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

A town with no children?

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

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

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

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

Here in Marlboro, we the voters are being asked to  
seriously consider closing our local elementary school in favor of  
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####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

107

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