



Rosthern Junior College

CONNECT

PEOPLE, NEWS AND EVENTS IN OUR COMMUNITY



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RJC Connect is published as a joint effort between Rosthern Junior College students, staff and alumni. This semi-annual publication celebrates our past, our present and our future, as together we shape the ongoing RJC story.

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We invite alumni to submit items of interest: births, deaths, marriages and other exciting events and transitions. Pictures will also be considered.

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AN OLYMPIC-SIZED COMMUNITY

It was a great privilege to attend this year’s annual homecoming and fundraising dinner where we celebrated RJC’s connections with the Olympics. The food was delicious, as usual, and the hosts and guests were entertaining and inspirational.

One highlight from the evening was watching the Borscht Torch Relay, a video featuring alumni from across the country passing the “baton of borscht” from person to person as it made its way to RJC. More than simply being entertaining, which it was, the video highlighted the power and reach of community, specifically our community at RJC. As I watched the pot of borscht pass from grandchild to grandparent, from farmer to city dweller, from recent alumni to old, I began to choke up. I was humbled to be part of this video, and to carry the “torch” for my leg of the journey.

RJC has experienced many transitions in the past few years, and I am grateful for the support I have received in my first months as principal, a position I began on July 1. I am fortunate to work with a supportive, creative, hard working and fun loving staff. Working with students energizes me and it gives me lots to chuckle about every day. What a blessing.

The RJC board has been more than supportive, and parents have been helpful and encouraging as they partner with staff to help students grow and develop within this unique learning community. Alumni and constituency members have given me many words of affirmation, and many people from supporting churches and faith circles have told me they pray for me.

In short, I know that I am not alone. I know that I am part of an Olympic-sized team and legacy: for this I am grateful.

We are all truly connected, and the more we live this truth in love the better off we will be, as people, as a church and as a school community.

Thank you for your contribution to the RJC community. Don’t ever doubt the importance of your connection with the school. Wherever you live, whatever you do and whatever your background, you are an important part of this Olympic-sized team. Let’s run this race together.

— Ryan Wood, Principal

SCHOOL LIFE

ACADEMICS

We continue to develop our grade-based educational programs: IMAGINE (grade 10), THRIVE (grade 11) and EXPLORE (grade 12). These programs, along with our community-based BELONG program, provide avenues for teachers and deans to pursue educational and community goals in creative and innovative ways.

IMAGINE: A grade 10 peacebuilding program



This fall IMAGINE students participated in a workshop facilitated by Mennonite Central Committee Saskatchewan. A perspective from Toshiro Kanamori provided the foundation for the workshop. In his fourth grade class Toshiro, a Japanese educational leader, works to foster a culture of love, compassion and support. At the heart of his approach to teaching is a focus on empathy. Kanamori states that these values can be cultivated in students when they “let people’s stories live in [their] heart.” After all, “there is no limit to how many people can live there.”

Empathy, love and compassion are fundamental values of the IMAGINE



program. By practicing listening and sharing, and incorporating these guiding values, students are developing a greater capacity to respond to issues of injustice.

Looking ahead, IMAGINE students will travel to Winnipeg for an intensive, week-long learning experience. Students will visit the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, local development organizations and church-affiliated partners to engage with instances of exclusion and oppression. By listening to the stories of people committed to pursuing peace, students will offer space in their heart for these stories to reside. According to Toshiro there should be plenty of space.

THRIVE: A grade 11 character development program



The grade 11 THRIVE program focuses on character development and healthy relationships. In the fall, students enjoyed a THRIVE class retreat at Shekinah Retreat Centre with Steve Heinrichs, the Mennonite Church Canada Indigenous relations coordinator, as our guest speaker. In three study sessions, Steve helped students read the Bible from different perspectives in an effort to build understanding between different peoples, cultures and backgrounds. Beyond this time of study, students embraced the opportunity to play, sing and experience the presence of one



another. These community-building retreats and activities are core to development of the healthy, life-long friendships RJC is known for.

EXPLORE: A grade 12 leadership program



This year, our EXPLORE program activities are centered around two guiding questions: who are you, and where are you going? We kicked off the year with our leadership retreat at Big River Bible Camp. Speakers Craig Neufeld and Kirsten Hamm-Epp led us in discussions about the temptations of power, popularity and relevancy and how we should respond as servant leaders.

Later in September we participated in an enneagram seminar with Katie Wiebe where we EXPLOred our personalities, strengths and weaknesses. In October, as we hiked Shekinah’s Ravine Trail, we attempted to see through the eyes of early settlers to this province as they EXPLOred this area for the first time.

We have hosted several universities in class this term, including the University of Saskatchewan and Canadian Mennonite University. We visited the See Your Future Career and Education fair in Saskatoon, and will tour Saskatchewan Polytechnic’s Saskatoon campus.



STAFF TRANSITIONS

At the end of the 2017-18 school year, RJC said goodbye to four staff members. Jamieson Fitzgerald left his position of boys' dean to pursue further education and Heather Grismer, RJC's art teacher, left to explore other professional opportunities.

Long-time staff member Bev Epp retired after 37 years of service. Bev was a beloved teacher and will be greatly missed in the hallways, classrooms, staffroom and on the sports fields. Read an exit interview with Bev on page 11.

And our Principal Jim Epp retired after 32 years of service. Jim's roles at RJC included working as a dean, teacher, vice-principal and principal. His legacy is one of dedication, commitment and servant leadership. Jim's presence at the school will be greatly missed, and we wish him all the best in his well-earned retirement.

RJC continues to benefit from a dedicated and committed staff. In the fall of 2018 we welcomed a new boys' dean, Michael Epp, and a new teacher, Zac Schellenberg. Michael graduated from RJC in 2012 and looks forward to

contributing in the dorm as well as on the football field and in the hockey rink as a coach.

Zac Schellenberg is recent grad from the University of Saskatchewan. His primary assignment will be co-teaching our Grade 10 IMAGINE program. He will also teach math, practical and applied arts and theatre arts. Zac's involvement with many organizations in the Mennonite Church Saskatchewan conference along with his musical abilities and good-natured smile are welcome additions to the RJC team.

ALUMNI NEWS



IF YOUR GRAD YEAR ENDS IN A 9...

Then you've got a reunion coming this summer! Some class reps are already hard at work planning the reunions, but we're looking for more reps! Contact Denelda Fast if you can help deneldafast@hotmail.com or 1-306-221-2846.

ALUMNI REUNIONS

10 years

By Michelle Cleland

Life is a balance of letting go and holding on. — Rumi

This summer we gathered as classmates on the front lawn of RJC, 10 years after our graduation. For many of us 10 years was how long it had been since we had seen or heard from each other. For others, regular or intermittent connection had remained over the last decade. As we gathered one by one, a large circle started to form. There were jokes made about how, “of course a circle forms as soon as we get back to RJC!” Very quickly the hesitation and mild awkwardness evaporated, guards were let down, ego and story were set aside. There was a sense of being among friends.

Out of a class of 36, there were 22 that came to be together. Those who were not there we held in our minds and conversations.

On Friday some chose to attend *Godspell* the musical. On Saturday we explored the school and saw the upgrades. We walked the halls and looked at our framed grad class photos. We noticed the paper of our 2008 grad year was already curling and warping from time gone past.

We dug up our prophecy: amazingly our map and calculations were very accurate and we found it on first dig. People took turns putting in an effort with digging, opening and unwrapping. When the prophecy was revealed we sat down in the sun and began to read, reminisce, share and laugh.

We took a group photo. Some people departed at this point, others had just arrived and the group carried on to my parents’ home in Rosthern to share potluck barbeque fare. We enjoyed eating, laughing, talking, playing games and even cleaning up together! Some folks continued with some late night



Front row: Jordan Zimmerly, Jeremy Enns, Evan Driedger, Alex Larabie. Second row: Cody Pauls, Jessica Banman, Erin Henderson Castle, Michelle Cleland, Ben Jones, Greg Boldt, Blue Markwart. Third row: Desiree Patkau, Vanessa Funk, Catherine Epp, Steven Hawrishok, David Epp. Back row: Thomas Driedger Enns, Nicholas Wiens, Luke Pulvermacher, Scott Feick.

libations at a classmate’s home in Saskatoon. It was good to be together; it was good to reconnect.

In the months leading up to our gathering, I had been reflecting on impermanence: the fragility and wonder of life. As I welcomed people to my parents’ backyard, I started by sharing that death had been present on my mind. I invited people to reflect on how we might be better able to connect with each other when we have a sense of meaning within our temporary physical existence. While there was laughter around this sentiment, there was also an acknowledgment of this truth. How beautiful to share the health and aliveness of our class. How beautiful to hold each other close while knowing that in many ways we have and will continue to let go.

Many of the group reflected or discussed that there had been fear or apprehension about coming to 10 year grad, about how they’d heard it could be uncomfortable, showy or have a feeling of competition. The resounding reflection by the end of our weekend together was that when we let go of where we each “should” be at, or let go of any whisper of judgement, we were able to connect as humans and friends.

We connected as people with a shared history, a shared experience and a myriad of experiences since our lives took

different paths. It is the hope that we each left refreshed and reconnected with reflections on what is important in life.

20 years

By Nicole Tiessen

It was hard to believe it had been 10 years since our last RJC decade reunion! We started planning early last year with anticipation and excitement of reconnecting with our RJC friends. We started the weekend on Friday night with a bonfire gathering at Taasha (Andres) and Andrew Gossen’s acreage east of Saskatoon. We had a great time visiting with everyone and it was great to see the next generation of RJC kids becoming instant friends! Thank you to Taasha and Andrew for opening your home to host everyone – it was a great outdoor summer venue!

For the Saturday festivities we were fortunate to use a local space in Rosthern as two of our RJC classmates, Matt Enns (1997) and Jake Hoepfner (1998), are involved in a new malt barley production company located in town. This was a great venue since it was not only a chance to check out our friends’ business, but its location also provided an opportunity to visit the school.

In the late afternoon, our class met at RJC to tour the school and dorms, reminisce about long-forgotten stories and to check out our carved bricks on the old school.



Front row: Sheldon Kruger, Maybelle (Janzen) Smith, Natalie Bishop, Robyn Regehr. Second row: Nicole Tiessen, Nadine (Eichendorf) Ens, Kelly (Lehmann) Klassen, Scott Wolfe. Third row: Adriene Wyse, Stacey Wiens, Chelan Green, Tennille (Pauls) Wakefield. Back row: Michael Biernacki, Lynette Zacharias, Pam Krahn, Taasha (Andres) Gossen, Rob Isaak

After our tour we headed over to Makers Malt for a catered supper and spent the evening (and into the next morning!) visiting with each other. It was great to reconnect with friends we hadn't seen in a while and to catch up on what the last 10 years has brought to each of our lives. We laughed at old photos (thanks to Stacey Wiens for bringing her old albums!) and reflected on the amazing experience of being an RJC student and what it gave each of us.

In reality the years we spent together as students at RJC were relatively short, but it is what that experience has given us after graduation that has had the greatest impact: lifelong friendships and a large community of alumni and supporters to connect with. For that each of us were grateful.

As students 20 years ago we had no idea what the future would bring as we tearfully said goodbye at fireside. Truthfully 2018 felt like such a long time in the future! A special thank you to all who travelled from near and far to attend and to those who wanted to come but sent regrets (we missed you!). After sweeping the floors and putting away the tables the last of us hugged goodbye in the wee hours of Sunday morning before heading home and promising that we will not wait ten more years to reconnect!

30 years By Tim Nickel

Many decade reunions, viewed from the outside, look similar. The few variations between them include where lunch is consumed, whether or not to attend the alumni supper and whether the final stage will be at a house or a bonfire. So, viewed from the outside, our reunion was true to form: lunch at Station Arts, tour of old school, ice cream downtown, alumni supper, musical, visiting at Mark and RaeLynn's.

What the outline does not show, however, is the significance of the interaction for those who attended. Each decade seems

to bring its triumphs and struggles. In each of the activities alumni rediscovered age-old friends, moving swiftly and safely from small talk to deep discussion, from laughter to tears. It had a "we're all in it together" feel. No point in being competitive when the great equalizer, teenage children, are concerned.

Several 1988 grads sent messages to the gathered group. We read each one out loud on the steps of the old school where we had taken our informal grad class picture 30 years before. We liked to hear that we were on the minds of those who couldn't make it.

There were moments off the schedule that stuck in people's minds. Most of us ended up in Pat's old classroom at one point swapping stories about what it was really like. Not the class, but rather how we felt: scared that we weren't as smart as the next person – or that we finally did feel smart when perhaps we didn't anywhere else. This continued through the whole reunion, we remembered who we were and saw each other anew. At our final stop, Mark and RaeLynn Hildebrandt's living room, stories about our lives and our children's lives continued to surprise and add contour to our ideas about each other and ourselves. We are grateful to RJC for providing us with lifelong friends. We are already looking forward to the next reunion.



Front Row: Mitch Dahl, Karla (Wiens) Wilson, Lisa Unrau, Shannon (Lobe) Krause. Second Row: Bonnie (Froese) Dahl, Mark Hildebrandt, Lana (Sherk) Nimigeers, Jodi (Regier) Reed. Third Row: Tim Nickel, Cora (Warkentin) Wickstrom, Scott Bergen.

40 years

By Dianne Janzen

Our day started off with a self-guided tour of RJC to reminisce and see all the school upgrades. From there we did a walking tour of Rosthern to see some of our favourite places, socialize with each other and get updated on everyone's current life.

We then met for supper at Solar Gardens, the weather was perfect so we were able to enjoy the beautiful gardens and scenery. Our evening included a build-your-own pizza supper, a slideshow of past and present, a memorial for two grads who have passed away (Donna Friesen and Chris Ewert), and a terrific evening of reminiscing and catching up on each others lives. Some continued the celebration at breakfast Sunday morning at The Saskatoon Inn.



Front row: Ed Unrau, Don Walde, Wilf Bartel, Marion Driedger, Donna Epp, Roxanne Neufeld, Karen Epp, Dianne Sawatzky, Dianne Friesen, Pat Driediger. Second row: Carl Harder, Delwin Epp, Chuck Paetkau, Brenda Redekopp, Doug Dueck, Nelda Wiebe, Gwen Mierau, Erwin Dyck, Rod Dyck, Ron Derksen. Third row: Rick Fehr, Mel Siemens, Al Martens, Lorine Zacharias, Marg Wiens, Cindy Dyck. Back row: Vern Epp, Russell Dueck, Marilyn Peters, Naomi Boldt, Judy Reimer, Diane Harms.

50 years

By Garry Koop

It was one of the best reunions yet. We visited like we were still in school and never missed a beat. We talked about our lives; our failures and successes, our laughter and sorrows. It was really nice to visit with everyone. There was some strong talk about having a decade plus one reunion next June. Thank you to all that worked so hard to have this reunion become such a great success.



Front row l to r: Yvette Penner-Ewert, Margie Schroeder-Haase, Brenda Regier-Tremblay, Mona Letkeman-Bergen, Karin Peters-Forshaw, Caroline Martens-Klassen, Audrey Mierau-Bechtel. Second row l to r: Ken Bergen, Lois Driedger, Ed Heese, Esther Wiebe, Rick Ens, Rita Schulz, Pat Beckert, Garry Koop, Dawn Epp, Dan Loewen, Sharon Epp, Warren Riemer, Harold Koop, Rita Redekopp, Harvey Krahn, Olive Janzen, Alf Wiebe, Carol Janzen, Arnold Harder, Ruth Wiens, Don Epp, Ruth Warkentin

60 years

By Erna Wiebe

We started our reunion with lunch at Nutana Park Mennonite Church while people got reacquainted. After lunch we stopped to remember those who have died. Later, we were asked to review what had taken place in our lives—always an interesting exercise!

In the late afternoon, we went to Rosthern to enjoy the alumni supper at RJC. Following the banquet, we attended the annual musical *Godspell* put on by the students. This was a very well done performance. Since many of the classmates had travelled long distances for the reunion, from Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and B.C., (Ron Unger again came by motorcycle!), we ended the weekend with a Sunday brunch at the Saskatoon Inn. All in all, it was an enjoyable weekend!



Back row: Eugene Lobe, Victor Hamm, Hugo Wiens, Aldred Neufeldt, Emil Bergen, Alvin Kraus, Bob Sawatzky. Front row: Erna (Klassen) Wiebe, Charlotte (Krahn) Neufeld, Ruth (Neufeld) Toews, Evelyn (Sawatzky) Kenny, Elsie (Rempel) Wiebe, Wilma Neufeld, Betty (Nickel) Wieler, Carolyn Dueck.



Front row: Helen Garmin, Louise Wiens, Verna Klassen, Erna Neufeld. Second row: Otto Driedger, Walter Klaassen, Jacob Berg, Elmer Neufeld. Back row: Ralph Dahl, Cornie Martens.

70 years By Jake Berg

Many of the 10 alumni who met at Bethany Manor this summer had not seen each other in 10 or more years. There was much hugging and hand shaking!

After supper, Cornie Martens asked the blessing on the persons assembled. Erna and Elmer Neufeld read the names of the 30 known deceased classmates, that was followed by a moment of silence. Afterwards each of us gave a brief update on the highlights of the past 10 years. All of us had been retired for all or most of those years. Many grandchildren were lauded. Almost everyone had made one or more interesting trips and several members had made notable contributions in the social and medical field.

Reminiscing of school days and past reunions continued over coffee, cookies and “plauts” provided by Verna Klassen and Erna Neufeld. Since some of the grads were attending the alumni banquet and musical at RJC the assembly adjourned with well wishes, a few tears and optimism for another reunion.

HOMECOMING BANQUET

A flood of flashbacks, reflections on the Homecoming banquet
By Chris Epp

It smells different. That was the first thing that struck me when I walked into RJC this fall. Granted, I haven’t been on campus much in the quarter-century since I graduated. Maybe a dozen times, the last being my 20 year reunion five years ago.

But for some reason, the school always smelled the same – kind of musty but in a comforting way. Like old wood. I’m not sure what’s changed. Maybe it’s all the renovations. Maybe they finally replaced some carpets.

The beauty of rarely being on campus is that when I am there, it’s like travelling back in time. Walking through the school brings back vivid memories. Reciting a Shakespeare soliloquy in English class. Chorale practice in the chapel. Going to

the office to pick up a care package from home.

Strolling through the dorm is the same—there’s the room where we played Kaiser every night. Or ping pong. That’s the window I snuck out of to play a prank on the girls, earning two 10:05s when I was caught.

Every step across the campus evokes a flood of flashbacks. The disappointment of not making the football team. The excitement of performing in dinner theatre. Nearly everyone was a stranger when I nervously showed up on campus in September of 1993. Now, they’re all soul mates.

I look at all the faces of my fellow graduates on our Class of 1993 photo, hanging upstairs in the school. There’s Lyndon – eight years after that picture is taken he and I will travel through Europe together. There’s Julia – in 21 years I’ll give a speech at her wedding. There’s Rebekah – 24 years later our sons will play on the same hockey team. There are so many other faces with so many more stories.

I also remember James. Greg. Grant. Three close friends and classmates who have died since our time at RJC, leaving us to cling to old memories instead of making new ones.

Attending RJC is an incredibly intimate experience at arguably the most vulnerable time of your life. But if I realized one thing when participating in homecoming weekend this year, it’s that as profound as my time was at RJC, it was by no means unique. I met dozens of people, among thousands of alumni who will always connect RJC to their earliest taste of independence, their closest friendships, their first kiss.

Before the homecoming banquet, an organizer asked if they should seat me with some former classmates since my family wasn’t able to come. “Absolutely,” I said. “They’re practically the same thing.” After the event was over, I sent a few texts to former classmates who I hadn’t

connected with in a while. Something about being back on campus made me need to check in and briefly relive old times.

That's what RJC is all about. The connections. The memories. The friendships. The legacy is always the same...even if the smell isn't.

ALUMNI TOURNAMENT

Always a joy to come back

By Heidi (Epp) Dyck (2010)

For the second time in almost 10 years I finally made it back to play in the volleyball tournament during the homecoming weekend! As a student, the alumni tournament was a weekend that I found both nerve wracking and exciting, to see and play against so many alumni. It was always interesting to see how many people came back for this weekend.

Now as a graduate, this weekend has become a fantastic time to reconnect with friends and family, some of whom I realized I had not seen since graduation. The RJC alumni tournament and homecoming weekend is always a great event with delicious food, fine people, pretty decent volleyball and a lot of sore

muscles! This tournament is a reminder of the amazing community RJC creates among its staff and students. As alumni, it is always a joy to come back to the school, not only to see long-time friends but also to continue to witness the time, effort and difference RJC makes in its students.

Friendly games at alumni soccer tournament

By Mackenzie Fast (2004)

The alumni soccer tournament was again held on the Saturday of the same weekend as the volleyball tournament. Thank you to Sarah Warkentin for coordinating the games and collecting the money! There were four teams of roughly nine players, a solid turnout despite the brisk weather. Everyone had fun in these laid-back, friendly games and no one had to get cold sitting on the bench!

Teams were divided with alumni and current students intermingled on the four teams. Both a morning and afternoon game were scheduled, but other commitments by a number of players meant there was only one game for each team in the morning. As a result, no champion was crowned and bragging rights will have to wait until next year.

Tournament transcends the high school experience

By Scott Feick (2008)

This year's RJC alumni volleyball tournament was once again a very fun and competitive weekend. It was especially exciting for my team (graduates from 2007-2011) since we ended up winning a very close final game against the current staff and older alumni team making us the tournament champions.

I find this annual tournament to be a very special weekend each year. In part because it gives athletes like myself the chance to learn a sport that we didn't get to play in high school and compete at a relatively high level. But what I find to be truly unique about this weekend is the diversity of age groups that compete with and against each other.

The RJC community transcends the high school experience through the avenue of sport, if only for a brief period of time. Meaningful relationships are formed or rekindled as old teammates reconnect with each other and welcome new players to join their team. Or as students face off against their teachers and find out they share a common interest in athletics. Players both young and old(er) are once again filled with the sense that they belong to the RJC community.



CONNECT INTERVIEWS



Lincoln Cheung and RJC classmate Jen Oland.

FROM RJC TO PROJECT RUNWAY,

Lincoln Cheung's life since graduation

Education at RJC can take people in a lot of different directions. But few grads have ended up with a career in fashion or have appeared on reality TV like Lincoln Cheung did since graduating from RJC in 1997.

Lincoln remembers realizing his interest in fashion during grade 12 at RJC. He would sketch in his notebooks during class to the point where a friend asked if he'd ever considered fashion design. He started looking into it, but "back then fashion wasn't really a thing," he says and his parents wouldn't support him attending design school. He went to the University of Saskatchewan instead, but after one disastrous year his parents realized that the traditional university path wasn't going to work and gave Lincoln their okay to pursue fashion.

He started with a one-year certificate in Saskatoon, got a three-year diploma from LaSalle College in Montreal and then received a scholarship to the London College of Fashion in England. After getting his bachelor's he worked for a year as an assistant, "I did everything from cleaning the studio to you know getting

people lunch to even cleaning toilets," he says.

That's when LaSalle College contacted him with an offer to show his collection back in Montreal. That led to a few job offers and he's worked in fashion design ever since.

In 2007 Lincoln decided to audition for Project Runway Canada, a reality show for fashion designers. He bought a DVD camcorder just to record his audition tape (promptly returning it afterwards), went through multiple phone interviews and an in-person screening of his collection to get accepted.

One memorable challenge was the day they made a cocktail dress out of umbrellas. Contestants were brought to a mountain of umbrellas and told to choose as many as they wanted. "So me being me," he says, "I was like I'm going to take a lot so that I have a back-up plan. So I took something like 25 umbrellas, got back to the studio and they were like well the catch is that you have to use all of them."

Though he was eliminated in the third round, Lincoln remembers it as a fun experience where he met a lot of great people. "I stayed true to myself, to who I am. I'm happy the way it turned out because I didn't want to trash talk other people, that's just not me," he says. Unfortunately, the day he was eliminated from the show was also the day of his 10-year RJC reunion and he missed the celebration.

After Project Runway, Lincoln continued to work in Montreal for another eight years as senior designer for Judith and Charles. While it was a great job, Lincoln and his partner in London had been doing long distance for years, through their engagement and wedding, so he decided to move back.

Though the fashion market is different in London, Lincoln has found work there as head of casual wear at Monsoon. He leads a team of designers and manages the biggest department for the brand. Though it can be stressful, he says enjoys the work. "It's quite challenging, but in a fun way, to design thinking about how to grow a business, picking up trends, analyzing trends and all that. It's really fun for me."

Though his career has taken him a world away from the small town of Rosthern, Lincoln made the trip back last year to attend his 20-year RJC reunion. "There are people that I literally have not talked to and seen in over 20 years, and then when you see them it's as if you have always known them and it is just such a surreal experience," he says.

Lincoln enjoyed a lot of his experiences at RJC, from extra curriculars and deep friendships to a wilderness trip in grade 12. But there were also difficult times. From a young age Lincoln knew he was gay but struggled with that at RJC and knew that coming out wasn't going to be accepted at the time. He also faced trauma at 16 years old during a weekend in Saskatoon, including a kidnapping and sexual assault by a group of people in

the city, in the final weeks of his grade 12 year.

Though he didn't share those experience with many classmates at the time, he's since been more public about it and found that his friends from 20 years ago are very supportive. When he shared on Facebook many reached out saying, "I had no idea, I wish I was there for you," Lincoln says.

That kind of support and kindness is something he says is characteristic of RJC students and is something he noticed at his reunion 20 years later. "Everyone is still really nice so that's another good thing about RJC, people are super nice," he says. "It was just amazing to see everyone and seeing how everyone had grown. A lot of them had families and kids and it's just really nice to see."

IT WAS REALLY GOD'S PLAN

An exit interview with
Bev Epp



Bev Epp is still not sure why she got hired at RJC. She wasn't Mennonite, hadn't graduated from the school and didn't have any other connections. After finishing her education degree she called the school about an open dean position on a tip from a friend of a friend. Now 37 years later she believes that was part of God's plan. Her work as dean and then as math and phys ed teacher at RJC was immensely rewarding. After her retirement, we caught up with Bev to hear her reflections on 37 years at RJC.

You started as a dean without knowing RJC, what made you want to work there?

Well I was talking this out with my husband Ralph and I said it really was God's plan not mine. I didn't know much about RJC, but the whole deaning thing sounded intriguing to me. At that point I had finished my education degree but I really was uncertain on whether I wanted to pursue my teaching career. So when this job came up it sounded like more along the lines of how I wanted to relate with young people.

It didn't take me very long working at RJC before I realized that RJC embraces the whole student as a person, and that's what I thought education should be like at 22 years old. It's much more than just teaching reading, writing and arithmetic. It was about developing the whole person.

On a personal level I think I experienced the magic of the RJC community the same way that I hope that kids feel when they come. I experienced at 22 the nurturing and feeling included and feeling like I belonged. All that helped me grow into the teacher and the person I am now.

What were the highlights of your time at RJC?

You know I tried to think of favourite memories and honestly there are so many things I can't even begin to list them. As a teacher the times I enjoyed the most were probably working with kids who were struggling, not just academically but sometimes with personal issues. They often would come back and thank me for being with them, but I always said to them "no really it should be me thanking you because in those times is when I actually felt most validated as a teacher and a mentor."

My other greatest highlight was that I really found joy in documenting the year and the students on camera. I worked really hard at capturing their personalities and their spirits.

What have been some of the challenges over the years?

When you're working with people there's always challenges. This is especially true

with kids who are strangers, the kids don't necessarily have a lot in common. So when you're trying to have people live together and build community there's always going to be challenges.

But the thing we stress the most at RJC is probably building community and the importance of relationships. So I think the challenges, when we work through those together, are what makes us stronger as a community and helps us build strong relationships.

What do you hope the students you've worked with take away from their time at RJC?


I guess what I wanted them to take away from the school would be that they belonged. That they were accepted and empowered to make changes in the world.


What do I hope the students learned from me? I think the only thing I could boil it down to was I hope that I made them feel special. They won't remember what I taught them in math. I always have said that I didn't teach because I loved math, even though I do love math. I used math so that I could teach kids. They won't remember what I taught them in math, I'm hoping when they think of what they learned I hope that they felt special with me.

This place has obviously meant a lot to you, what do you hope for the future of RJC?

Sometimes there are conversations that this kind of a school has run its course, but none of us there believe that it's not a viable thing. We believe that society needs us more than ever. So I'm hoping that people will understand the importance of the kind of education that is offered there, the kind of wholeness, and that they continue to support it.

One of my favourite things that Ryan Wood would often say when the bell would ring in the morning, is "Well, here we go — changing the world one student at a time." It started off as a joke but it really is a phrase that captured what it was that we were doing. I guess that's what I hope for RJC, changing the world one student at a time.

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CONNECT WITH US

We hope you enjoy this edition of RJC Connect, our semi-annual newsletter that keeps you updated on student life, alumni happenings, school events and everything that makes the RJC community such a vibrant, exciting place.

If you'd like to suggest story ideas, please email us at office@rosthernjuniorcollege.ca

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