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**Joel Davis**

Special to The Enterprise

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An acquaintance of mine who is an education administrator once compared some of the problems he encounters in academia with the "problems" of **Davis**.

"The pettiness is so high because the stakes are so low," he cracked.

I live in an older part of East Sacramento, so I still hear about the so-called problems of my hometown by osmosis, shrugging off most, while taking note from the periphery of the truly serious ones.

I also live around the corner from an old elementary school that was built in 1950 and is thriving.

It is ethnically diverse. Despite the dangers of the occasional speeding minivan piloted by harried parents, neighborhood kids happily walk and bike to school. It has the look 000200000425000002DF 41F, and feel of a neighborhood elementary school rather than a heavily guarded suburban aerospace facility. Immersion programs aren't needed because the diversity is immersion enough. Sound familiar?

I have often pointed out to my wife that our little neighborhood school reminds me of **Valley Oak** Elementary, where I was a student/scamp (mostly a scamp) from kindergarten through fifth grade in the 1970s. My sister and I walked and bicycled there without fear from our home a few blocks away. The teachers seemed a bit more laid-back than at other schools around town, even a bit on the hippie side. And tie-dyed art projects aside, I remember them as good teachers.

With its big fold-out windows and shiny red hallways — ideal for sliding metal lunch boxes as if they were curling stones — musty multipurpose room and generous blacktops and playfields, **Valley Oak**, a school ringed by older, modest neighborhoods and irresistibly climbable pine trees, just felt like an elementary school should feel. Right out of a "Peanuts" special.

**Valley Oak** by its very 000200000414000006FE 40E, location — the other side of the tracks in a well-heeled town where that phrase seems quixotic but nevertheless symbolizes a very real divide between the haves and the haves-a-bit-less — is a school that, unlike an alley or a sculpture or a toad crossing or a septic tank, seems necessary to preserve. The stakes, this time, are high.

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Because of what is said to be declining enrollment and a more modern school up the road, **Valley Oak** is in danger of closing. To close down a public school is a serious issue impacting myriad lives. I have first-hand experience of this, being part of the last class to go through the old Emerson Junior High School at Fifth and B streets in 1976.

As I recall, the closure had something to do with earthquake retrofitting and saving around \$100,000. I am sure the current Emerson is a fine school, but the old Emerson, like the current **Valley Oak**, was a creaky but beloved school of distinct style in an older part of town.

You were surrounded by downtown **Davis** and the university, and it was wonderful. 00020000071600000B0C 710, The surroundings were the campus. It broke my heart to be transferred to an overcrowded Holmes the following year as the current Emerson was built in the 'burbs. Nobody seemed happy at Holmes that year.

Sometimes bigger/newer is better, sometimes it is not. **Davis** High's bigger North Gym reminds me of a mausoleum. I attended the Les Curry Invitational there a few weeks back, and there were more empty seats than occupied ones; organizers didn't even bother pulling out the bleachers on one side of the gym when the host team was on the floor. Les Curry guided his teams with a fiery leadership in the neighboring smaller gym, and it was usually packed.

What I saw in the bigger better facility had all the electricity of a Saturday morning practice.

UC **Davis'** Toomey Field may look like a high school football facility, but it was the perfect link between the university and the community, where the often-awkward worlds harmonized on leafy Saturday afternoons. I am sure the new Aggie football field will be a gem, but it won't be Toomey. With the possibility of a lot of empty seats for the less-meaningful games or games when the students are on break, it may very well be gloomy.

But I digress. I am not going to pretend to be dialed in on the key issues surrounding the possible closure of a school that holds a place in my heart. I am a nostalgic outsider looking back in.

But if **Valley Oak** still serves a purpose, especially to the lower rung of the ladder in a mostly enlightened city that nevertheless has something of a NIMBY track record on racial and socioeconomic issues, then I find the possible closure of a simple but sturdy school named after a simple but sturdy tree nothing short of tragic.

— **Joel Davis** is a Sacramento writer and **Valley Oak** alumnus. Reach him at joel\_waits81@yahoo.com

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