

Arcata Christian School: A Journey Through Northern California's Redwood Forests

Introduction: A Life in the Redwood Forests

In the mid-1970s, my family moved to the quiet town of Eureka, California, nestled in the majestic redwood forests of Northern California. Arcata Christian School was where my academic journey began, and its impact is still with me today. At the time, my family was part of a religious movement with controversial ties, including connections to Jonestown. However, despite the tumultuous nature of that period, Arcata Christian School provided a safe and nurturing environment for me and my siblings, and it became a place where I learned valuable life lessons.

A Unique Educational Experience

Arcata Christian School was small, with a close-knit community of students. The school was private, which allowed for more flexibility in how they approached education. This was especially important for me, as my early education didn't quite fit the conventional mold. You see, my birthday falls in January, and the standard cut-off date for school enrollment was usually November or December. I missed it by just a couple of months. As a result, I was younger than most of the kids in my grade, which would have presented challenges. However, the school placed me in a situation that would have far-reaching consequences.

My older brother, who was two years ahead of me, had his own academic path. I found myself taking placement tests and being placed with the third graders, even though I was only in first grade. Looking back, I realize I was too young for this level of work. But, in true Arcata Christian School fashion, they made the decision to allow me to skip first grade and move directly into second grade the following year. This set the stage for my future years at the school—always one year behind my older brother and, as a result, always the youngest in my grade.

The Perks and Pitfalls of Being the Youngest

Being the youngest in my grade had its ups and downs. The downside was that I often got clobbered in sports by bigger kids. They weren't always aware that I was a year behind, and in games like soccer or basketball, I was at a distinct disadvantage. But there were many advantages as well. I had the opportunity to hang out with older kids, which meant I got to do things that many kids my age weren't allowed to do. I also had the rare experience of dating "older women," or at least, that's what I thought of it at the time. These experiences helped shape me in ways that would be important later in life.

The Christmas Musical and a Memorable Moment

One of the most memorable moments at Arcata Christian School came during the Christmas musical. We were all part of the production, and I was cast as one of the three kings. My role was to play the oriental king who brought frankincense to baby Jesus. The costume, a simple

but effective creation, was made with the help of our teenage babysitter, Julie. She was kind enough to teach me about frankincense, explaining it was like incense, though I had no idea what incense was at the time.

Julie even brought some frankincense with her to show me, and she allowed me to light the incense during the performance. I was given a lighter, and when my big moment came, I was ready. After singing "We Three Kings," I moved to light the frankincense, which, unbeknownst to me, would set the stage for chaos. The small wooden manger had hay on the ground, and as soon as I ignited the incense, a cloud of smoke quickly filled the room. The audience erupted into panic, and the room was filled with chaos. It seemed as though everyone thought the world was coming to an end!

The situation quickly escalated. Parents were angry, and I was scolded and punished for causing such a scene. The babysitter, Julie, was nowhere to be found, and my reputation as a "troubled kid with a fire fixation" started to form. That incident effectively ended my theatrical career for nearly a decade. To this day, that story has been told in many different ways, but I will always remember the puff of smoke and the ensuing chaos that followed.

Spelling Bee Champion: A Humbling Victory

Despite the fiery debacle of the Christmas musical, there were also moments of triumph at Arcata Christian School. One of those moments came during the annual spelling bee, a competition I was eager to participate in. I was in kindergarten at the time, and I had already managed to win the first-grade spelling bee. After my victory, we stayed in the room to watch the second graders compete. When the final two contestants couldn't spell the final word correctly, the teacher called on me to step in. The word? "Queen." It was a simple word, but it carried a weight of expectation. I spelled it correctly, and with that, I won the second-grade spelling bee as well.

For me, winning the spelling bee was more than just a victory—it was a moment of recognition. The younger me, always the "youngest kid" in my grade, had proved that even though I was younger than my classmates, I could still stand out and excel. The moment filled me with confidence and reinforced my belief in the value of perseverance and dedication. Arcata Christian School, despite its small size, had fostered an environment where such achievements were possible, and they were celebrated by the entire community.

A Close-Knit Community

One of the greatest things about Arcata Christian School was its sense of community. The small size of the school meant that everyone knew each other, and the teachers took a personal interest in each student's success. It wasn't just a place to learn academics—it was a place where relationships were built and faith was nurtured. The teachers and staff were dedicated to fostering an environment where children could thrive spiritually, emotionally, and academically.

The school was a place where we learned about the importance of kindness, integrity, and faith. As a result, my classmates and I formed close relationships, and the friendships I made during

those years remain with me to this day. Arcata Christian School was more than just a stepping stone on my academic journey—it was a formative experience that helped shape my values and perspectives in life.

Conclusion: A Foundational Experience

Looking back on my time at Arcata Christian School, I realize how much it influenced my life. From the challenges of being the youngest in my grade to the unforgettable chaos of the Christmas musical, every moment at the school shaped who I became as a person. It was a school where I was not only educated in subjects like math, reading, and science but also in the importance of community, faith, and perseverance. I'll always be grateful for the foundation Arcata Christian School provided, and for the lessons I learned during my time there.