

Enjoy the Sunshine

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What was I doing in Terrace, British Columbia on the twentieth of January? Arriving from the Lower Mainland's world of greenery and rain, I landed in a wintry landscape ready to visit three northern schools. The next morning I pulled into the parking lot of a Save-on Food Store to buy some breakfast. The wind had kicked up over night and I found myself in the midst of swirling sand that had once been spread to provide traction on the parking lot. By the time I made it through the grit and reached the store I felt rather disheveled. My eyes were watering as they tried to deal with dirt particles as well as contact lenses.



When I approached the checker, it seemed she was sizing me up with some amusement. I could imagine how I looked. A new spiked hairdo, red, watering eyes, a tie over my shoulder... I felt she needed some kind of explanation. I ventured a rather weak "It's pretty windy out there!" (Now that was obvious.) She agreed as she placed my things in the plastic bag, smiled and said, "Yes, but it is sunny today. Enjoy the sunshine!"

As I left the store, I looked straight ahead to view the sight in the new light of the checker's smile. Outside, the parking lot was the same as before. The dust was still swirling for twenty or so feet in the air but higher up was the glorious blue sky, sunshine and snow-capped mountains I had glossed over on my way in.

Shame on me, I thought as I reflected on the day's bad start. I realized that the encounter had given me an altogether different focus!

I followed the frozen Skeena River toward the second school and pondered some applications for myself and educators in the Adventist school system.

We are driven by the conviction that we do important work. Despite efforts over the years to make the system more professional, to improve the curriculum and better train new teachers, the Canadian and North American enrollment graphs are disappointingly flat. They are that good only because more and more non-Adventist children are entering the system thereby offsetting the declining Adventist enrollment.

There is always the hope that something said in an education sermon, at a school open house or in a colorful school brochure, will encourage Adventist families to once again support the Adventist school like their parents and grandparents once did.

Some Adventist parents reject the small Adventist school and place their children instead in larger public

or Christian schools. Somehow, they miss the idea that small Adventist schools would become larger by enrolling more Adventist children in them.

To increase enrollment, a number of Adventist schools have added Kindergarten to the lower grade classrooms, have taken in students who academically or behaviorally did not make it in public schools, have thrown out the Adventist / non-Adventist ratios and have changed the once singular mission of the school to save our youth to a two-pronged thrust to save our youth and be an evangelistic tool to the community. The outcome - a school system in North America where enrollment remains flat and continues to retreat from the edges. The "glacier" is getting smaller.

Consider the options. Close our schools and send our children to public schools. Close our schools and send our children to other Christian schools. Close our schools but build secondary seminaries next to the high schools like the Mormons. There may be Adventists who would support one of these choices. But isn't there something to be said for the testimony of the messenger who envisioned an Adventist school system, the mission of the church and the commitment of Godly teachers who can "see beyond" the edges of possibility?

Adventist schools are still important to many Adventist Christians, they trigger the imagination of non-Adventists happy to find an amazing alternative to public school, and have dedicated visionary teachers who see their students as potential citizens of heaven.

The reason Adventist educators do what they do to make the system work is because there really isn't any other satisfactory choice. They could be complaining about the everyday irritants of the daily "dust cloud," but instead they choose to see the blue sky and sunshine.

We need to keep carrying on, but perhaps differently than in the past. When I work at my desk in Abbotsford, I can only imagine what is happening in our schools. However, when I actually visit the schools and see the teachers and students in action, I get excited. Perhaps we need to work harder to get Adventists into our schools to see the good things going on there. Our schools have wonderful success stories to tell. We have not always been good storytellers!

God wants his children to learn of Him. I am convinced that He still uses Adventist teachers to do this. The stories of students being influenced by Christian teachers are being written every day. We run a school system because there are kids to save. How could we ever lose sight of that?