

## **Twenty IFs - The Yearly History of a Change in Plans 1973-1974 - Promises Made - Promises Broken and Four IFs**

### **The Summer of 1973**

The big project for the Summer was to create eight Reading Program kits for use in our Learning Tree Mini School. For this project, we used the money from my brothers to purchase the materials, and our fellow Learning Tree teachers to assemble the kits. Work on the eight kits started in July and finished halfway through August. We were all excitedly ready and waiting for Learning Tree's first school year to begin.

### **Promise Made - Promise Broken**

In August, right after we finished making the kits and a week before teachers were to begin returning to school to get their classrooms ready for the year, Alex asked me to pay him a visit at Mayfair. When I arrived at his office, he handed me a letter notifying me that he had transferred me to another school within the Alum Rock School District.

Promise made. Promise broken. Alex was as untrustworthy as we had assumed him to be from the beginning. I don't even remember which school was to be my destination because it made no difference to me. I was not going. As I said way back in the [What I Learned About Myself](#) sub-section of the [High School Junior Year](#) section of [Chapter 2 – My Path to Becoming a Teacher](#) was, I don't care who you are, if you don't treat me right, I won't behave the way you want me to. You can't make me. More specifically, in this case, you can't make me go anywhere I don't choose to go. Kicking me out of Learning Tree Mini School was most decidedly not right. I knew as soon as Alex handed me my notice of transfer that I was about to be fired for insubordination. There was no other choice for me.

### **No Learning Tree/No Voucher Experiment**

No dream job, in fact, no job at all, and no Learning Tree Mini school. I went home and informed Mary of what had just happened. Mary then submitted her resignation to the school district. We contacted all of the Learning Tree teachers to tell them what had happened. All but one of the teachers immediately requested transfers out of Mayfair to any other school in the district. All requests were granted, and in one quick stroke, the Learning Tree Mini school had disappeared.

The one teacher who did not request a transfer was Lynn Pruzan. At that point in time, kindergarten teachers were in shared classrooms, with one teacher teaching a morning class and the other teaching a separate afternoon class. Lynn was Mike Garcia's co-teacher, so she stayed there for him. Lynn, then, of course, became our on-the-scene source for learning of the school chaos that followed.

I know what Alex thought would happen when he transferred me out of Mayfair to, what the Deputy Superintendent told me later, Alex thought was a much better school. Alex assumed naively that I would just go wherever he sent me, and his problems would be over. The Deputy Superintendent assumed that, too. He was shocked to learn that I had refused the transfer. He assured me that if I refused to accept the transfer, my then being fired for insubordination would mean no other district would ever hire me. I know what Alex and the Deputy thought, but they were as wrong as they could be.

With the transfer that led to my being fired, Learning Tree disappeared. Hundreds of Mayfair parents who had signed up for our mini school and the Reading Program now had no school, no teachers, and no program. The cause of this disaster was no secret. For all the problems the school now faced, Alex was the only one to blame.

Alex justified breaking his “no transfer” signed promise to the staff by saying that his signature on the document meant only that he had read it. However, his breaking of his promise also broke all the rules of the voucher mini school program. Mini schools were to succeed or fail through their own efforts and not through some administrative whim. Alex’s broken promise had repercussions way beyond Mayfair School.

The district’s backing of Alex’s broken-promise transfer of me, despite all the other promises made to teachers, killed the voucher experiment. No additional schools agreed to join the experiment the following year. As a result, the voucher project was cancelled early, costing the district millions in lost funding. The ending of the voucher experiment also ended Alex’s already failing Bilingual Mini school, as well. When things calmed down, Alex was quietly transferred out of Mayfair School to a meaningless district office job. Superintendent of Del Rio, Texas Schools was now not even a remote possibility.

### **The Making of a New Plan**

Instead of spending the 1973-1974 school year teaching for the Learning Tree Mini school, Mary spent her time working on her math book manuscript and giving workshops with her friend Marilyn Burns. Marilyn had not wanted a “trainee” as part of her Miller Math team, but Mary had impressed Marilyn, first because her “classroom” approach to her sessions was so well received by the participants and second because she ended up needing no training at all from Marilyn.

I spent the year working on my math book manuscript and serving as the traveling teacher’s manual for the eight Reading Program kits we had made for use in the Learning Tree Mini school. The kits followed the Learning Tree teachers who had asked to be transferred out of Mayfair to

their new classrooms. Mary's and my kits went to the kindergarten classrooms at a school in the Franklin-McKinley School District, where Diana Morse, Mary's student-teacher, who had told us about the Principal at Mayfair School, was now a teacher.

I also spent my time with a teacher's union lawyer suing the Alum Rock School District to get my job back, based on both the voucher program's promises made to teachers and Alex's signed promise not to transfer any teacher out of Mayfair School. I lost the case, of course, but to keep me from being rehired, the School District had to publicly repudiate all its voucher commitments, which, of course, ended up killing the voucher program and all its federal funding.

### **The Two Math Books**

Mary and I were still CIME instructors. CIME was experiencing the same problem that Miller Math had. Teachers would take the workshops and then end up not changing anything about their own teaching. The Miller Math and now CIME lessons and materials would still be brought out mostly as rainy-day activities to keep children occupied when it was too wet to go outside.

In addition to giving CIME workshops that Summer, Mary and I had given a week-long workshop for the Cutler-Orosi school district near Visalia. During that week, we rented a conference room at the motel where we were staying and used it to begin writing our two math books.

Our purpose in writing both books was to give teachers who had taken either the Miller Math or the CIME workshops a teacher's guide on how to fit the workshop's math lessons into their classrooms on a daily basis. We wanted teachers to use what they had been taught in the summer workshops as their actual math curriculum, and not just on rainy days.

I gave my book the title *Mathematics... a Way of Thinking* because that is what I feel math is. Initially, Mary thought she would use the same title for her book. Hers would be *Mathematics a Way of Thinking* for the Primary Grades and mine could be *Mathematics a Way of Thinking* for the Intermediate Grades. Within a week or two of our starting writing, Mary came up with a better name for her book, *Mathematics Their Way*.

Mary and I both wanted CIME to give follow-up workshops for teachers during the school year to provide support to them as they changed how they were teaching. Since all but one of the other CIME instructors were math-resource teachers, who had little if any experience integrating math into all the other subjects taught by classroom teachers, follow-up sessions were not something in which CIME was interested. So, follow-up would have to wait.

#### **Four IFs**

IF Alex had not replaced Jerry as the principal of our school,  
Then whether or not there was Bilingual Mini School would never have  
been a factor in my leaving or staying at Mayfair School. The success  
of Learning Tree would have been accepted and allowed to continue for  
the length of the Voucher Experiment

IF Alex had honored his written and signed promise to the Mayfair Staff  
and/or,

IF the Alum Rock School District had honored its policy of having the  
fate of voucher mini schools decided by parental choices,  
Then, Learning Tree Mini school would have continued to exist, and Mary  
and I would have remained classroom teachers for our teaching  
careers. The Reading Program would have gained national recognition  
and eventually been accepted for publication and national distribution.

IF Mary and I had not felt the need to write curriculum guides for the  
participants in both the Miller Math and CIME workshops,  
Then neither *Mathematic Their Way* nor *Mathematics a Way of Thinking*  
would ever have been written.