LAMORINDA

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Published September 12th, 2012 Sharing the Moment with Photojournalist Wayne F. Miller Laurie Snyder



"Stiffer homework, more demanding classroom work, maturing bodies, and new boy-girl awareness," wrote Miller. "The sixth grade children I photographed were considered an exceptional group. They worked well together." Copyright, Wayne F. Miller, 1958. Used with permission. Many photographers, even amateurs, freeze important moments in time - family birthdays, fun with friends. The incomparable few - like Matthew Brady or Dorothea Lange enable viewers to truly appreciate time, place, and culture.

Wayne F. Miller is one of those. Following his time as a photographer with the U.S. Navy, he turned his attention to the children of Orinda. Miller and his wife, Joan, arrived here in 1949. "It was a growing community which had its roots still in the existing culture," Miller reflected recently in a conversation at his Orinda home. Writing about the unincorporated community in his 1958 book, The World Is Young, he said: "It is a new community without tradition, grandmothers, and until this year, enough children to make up a senior class in high school."

Published when Miller was 40, the book chronicles the lives of the Millers and their children and the youngsters of Glorietta Elementary School from 1955 to 1958.

"A perceptive man once said that 'to look at the world through the eyes of another would be true knowledge.' This is what I have attempted here. For three years, I have tried to look with children rather than at them, and to see through their eyes," he wrote. "Perhaps it shows that others often think and feel as we do, that the need to love and be loved is in everyone, that each of us would rather succeed than fail, would rather know than not know."

Preschoolers yearn to join in as elder siblings head to school, moms and little ones struggle with their goodbyes, and friends are made - and lost. Children giggle and laugh with heads back at the Orinda Theatre, growing girls sleep over, boys huddle, tweens dance - in what Miller calls "sharing the moment."

"Before my eyes were fabrics being woven and courses charted that would be with these children to their dying day," he wrote. "Failure, frustration, and defeat, success, pleasure, and triumph were being carved into their natures."

Miller, in describing his book's viewpoint, wrote that "all pictures were taken from the subject's eye level, so that the people and the things around them would be seen in a proper context. There were few 'little' children in the book. They are all full size, life size, their size. The best proof I had that this was the right approach came on the playground one day during a Maypole program. I was on one knee making photographs when a pre-schooler came over, threw his arms about me and kissed my cheek. Being on the same level, I decided, creates understanding."

Many of Miller's photographs are available through the U.S. National Archives; others may be enjoyed through his publications available at the Orinda Historical Society and the Orinda Library. His photos may also be purchased through Magnum Photos, the gallery which represents him: www.magnumphotos.com.



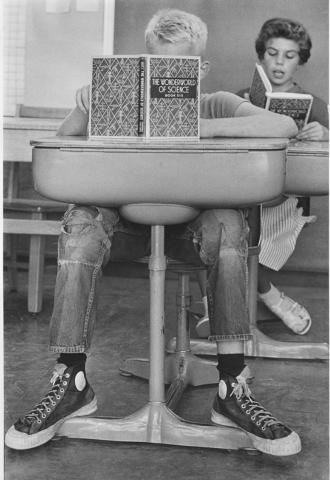
Preschooler, Peter Miller (Wayne and Joan Miller's youngest child), longs to join his siblings at school. Copyright, Wayne F. Miller, 1958. Used with permission.

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Peter, the kindergartner, radiates joy the next year as he gets his wish. Copyright, Wayne F. Miller, 1958. Used with permission.



"'In Sixth, you get down to business," wrote Miller of his sixth grade subjects at Glorietta Elementary School. All photos copyright, Wayne F. Miller, 1958. Used with permission. Copyright, Wayne F. Miller, 1958. Used with permission.

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"Resignation," responded Miller when asked to describe this math test moment experienced at some point by every student, everywhere. Copyright, Wayne F. Miller, 1958. Used with permission.



Though "her class was being broken up and she was moving to another school," wrote Miller of this sixth grader, "a much-admired teacher would still be with her."



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"Their spirits were always high and they had an extra eagerness to learn. The class had more than its share of leaders in all fields - scholastic, athletic and social. It made me feel good just to be with them," wrote Miller. Copyright, Wayne F. Miller, 1958. Used with permission.

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