

I can still remember the first time I actually saw any real live farm animals. Cows, pigs, goats, chickens, ponies. I remember most of them being simply huge. Hearing the sounds of real oinks and quacks. Being just amazed as the 'farmer' hooked up a cow to a milking machine and thinking that is what I drink all the time? This big event did not take place in the country on a real farm. This was part of a school field trip to the Lincoln Park Farm-in-the Zoo on North Clark Street in Chicago, Illinois. And well over 50 years later Chicago kids are continuing to get the same chance to experience a bit of the country in the city.

I read all of Jay Mathews' columns in *The Washington Post*. His column last Thursday was on the decline of field trips in schools. How field trips are falling victim to budget cuts. How more and more parents and foundations are picking up the tab. How research shows the benefits students get when they actually get out of school and into the world. How actually seeing the 'real' thing sticks a lot longer than pictures or textbook descriptions. I had seen pictures of horses and cows. I had read *Make Way for Ducklings* and *The Story of Ferdinand*. But getting to see the animals up close and personal at the Zoo Farm was just what I needed to make these animals real to me.

At Lafayette we still go on lots of field trips. This week our 4<sup>th</sup> graders are going to see the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the Kennedy Center. You can watch all you want on TV but until you see what these dancers can do live you really haven't experienced the artistry of the human body in motion. In March we have been invited to attend the Washington National Opera look-in of the new opera *Moby Dick*. The students will be attending a special presentation that includes some singing but lots about the stage effects that are created that brings an opera to life. If this is anything like the one I saw for *Madame Butterfly*, it will be unforgettable. We have some embassy trips on the schedule and the big overnight to Gettysburg in June. Last year the first grade got to see the White House all decorated for the holidays. In the spring they will visit Mount Vernon. This month kindergarten braved the cold and went to the Air and Space Museum. The list can go on and on.

We can do all of this because of your support for our academic program. Each year Lafayette teachers get together and plan the year's activities for each grade. They figure out what each trip will cost. DCPS does not have buses like the counties do so we are responsible for our own transportation. We find out what entry fees will be. Your child's student activity fee is based on these calculations. When unexpected opportunities occur, like the opera look-in, we often turn to the HSA for help. The buses for this trip will be paid for by some of the funds HSA lets me use to support programs at the school. I also have access to funds to make sure that every student at Lafayette can participate in all of these opportunities without worrying about the costs.

I know that many of the children at Lafayette go on lots of 'field trips'. They tell me about trips you take over vacations and long weekends. There are so many opportunities to visit so many places in the DC area. You take good advantage of them. But sometimes we can go where you can't. We try to use our connections well. So off we go on another field trip. To see what an orchard of apple trees looks like. To see a real pumpkin patch. And even see some cows and pigs. I went on the farm trip one year. Not to the zoo but to a real farm. But your children were just as impressed with the animals as I was. How big they are. How the little pigs make such funny noises. How soft a sheep is. Things they need to see,

touch, and hear (and smell) to really understand. So thank you for making it possible for us to get out of school once in a while and take a field trip. What a wonderful way to learn!