


Where You Once Stood Stand

By Mick Kendig

Where, When, What

In Millersville, Maryland there stands a sprawling brick box built in 1975. It is hugged by town houses and small single-family homes in all stages of life from newborn suburban box houses and the gaudy teen struggling for your attention in their trendy craftsmen dressing to the demure adult houses content in their white and tan conformity with their well-adjusted families. The Brick Box is frequently said to have been the work of an ex-prison architect trying his hand at a new hopeful medium.

You'd never guess he'd done anything different from his previous work though after looking at that squat, weed infested building with few to no windows (all of which are foggy plastic not glass).

The only splash of color on this mud red building is the red, white, and blue lettering identifying the building “Old Mill  Patriots”. This Brick Box was both my middle school and my high school all wrapped up in one bursting and barely functioning building. The building housed two middle schools: Old Mill North and Old Mill South, as well as Old Mill Highschool.

This may not seem like a good idea. In fact, it was frequently proven to be a bad idea.



The entrance sign to the Complex denoting the three schools housed in the complex



The few windows made of plastic



The Old Mill Complex from above

All three schools were frequently locked down, evacuated or shut-in thanks to a threat or issue in just one of the schools. One semester, the shared boiler blew four different times. Every time all three schools to evacuate for an hour.

But as annoying as that was, we were used to it.

Students were used to filing out of those red and blue doors with every single fire drill anyway.

The thing to watch out for were the brawls that broke out between the two middle schools.

There was a reason we had more than one resource officer (AKA police) stationed at the Old Mill complex. Knife fights and the like were not uncommon though usually they happened in the woods behind the school.

The rivalry was based in the North kids' superiority complex over South kids. You see Old Mill North was an IB school (only since 2005 though) and therefore required an entrance exam, so the students looked down on the public-school students of Old Mill South even though we had a S.T.E.M. program.

It worked out though since what South kids lacked in overbearing test score parents they made up for with brown bag lunches and book fairs.

Eventually we would all get over it though when we all fed into the same Highschool. There we were largely in the same classes and stuck in the same resume boosting clubs and scholarship winning sports teams.

National Honor Society,

Football,

National Art Honor Society,

Soccer,

Key Club,

Baseball,

SGA,

Lacrosse,

Shutter Society,

Bowling,

Theater,

Tennis,

Etc.

If you weren't in the same clubs you'd eventually solve your differences in the school cafeteria swapping food, or you'd do it in detention while fucking with the admin.

All seven years I attended that dingy school with walls that didn't even touch the ceiling (Courtesy of the 1970's open air teaching philosophy bleeding into building design), there were rumors that the school was next on the district's list of schools to tear down and reconstruct. There was always talk floating around of how the three schools would be split into three separate buildings since the school was the largest and most overcrowded in the county. (It was actually placed third on the priority list in 2006 by The AACPS Board of Education but was deemed too expensive).

When I came home from College the fall of 2019, I found that the rumors were finally coming true. The land down the road from me had been bought, the farm there, Papa John's Farm, was torn up and forgotten. Construction on the new school was beginning.

Every time that I come home since then, there has been substantial progress made on the new school. A few months after the land was acquired, the land was flattened, and they had begun digging. When I came back a few weeks after that there were already cinderblocks being laid and men in orange vests were nearly a story up in what looked like stairwell shafts.



Proposed plan of Old Mill West Highschool

1 of 4 buildings the existing complex will be split into

The clock is ticking now. I can see the long and short hands blurring with speed as they count down. I increasingly find myself thinking about my time at Old Mill Middle School South and the High School these days.

Why?

All I wanted back then was to **not be there**, stuck in what I considered a personal hell patrolled by specialized bully squadrons in their standard issue Hollister outfits. I remember hiding in the art class during lunch with my best friend, and later in the chorus room where some friends and I covered songs together. And maybe its hindsight or the rose-tinted glasses that are BOGO with most memories but it's hanging over me. This desire and trepidation telling me I should go back.

I know Highschool sucks for everyone: Curdled milk in lunches, getting shoved in hallways that better resemble sardine cans, the specific queasiness of waking up before the sun herself just to sit and learn quadratic equations or memorize rhetorical devices. I don't miss the hours of insipid teenage gossip and the toils of navigating my adolescent need to belong and know myself while also navigating the issues of filling a resume with various honor societies', random extracurriculars and three part time jobs just to apply for colleges I didn't even want to attend. Still, I miss napping in the auditorium and playing Cards Against Humanity in the yearbook room during lunch. I loved helping my PTA President mom set up her spirit wear booth at after-school functions. I wouldn't have said so then, but I loved going to football games (that I didn't know the rules to) just to yell at the ref and not so sneakily sip from a hidden flask made from the top inch of four different bottles of liquor someone took from their parents' bar.

But sometimes as I'm driving by the Goodwill, I think about going just a bit further. Driving past "The Rock Church" and the McDonalds, and finally turning left onto Old Mill Lane and visiting my alma mater. That quarter mile stretch of road caught my feet nearly every day as I walked to the shopping plaza around the corner in search of a greasy snack or my next thrifted treasure. It was all about vibing and killing time at that point.

Most days,
that's all I **could** do.

Once in a while friends would join in but usually it was

just me.

loitering.

But man, when my old gang came along...

I miss those days, those places.

I miss them.

Now, I'm sitting here looking at my yearbooks. They are riddled with HAGS, XOXO'S, and "see ya next year" and I'm left with the knowledge that I haven't spoken to many of those people since graduation.

Who:

The knowledge that my High School will soon be torn down stares me down like the high beams of a truck on I-95 at 2am. Every time I go home now I see something new tolling the demise of my High School, the time capsule safeguarding all my memories. When that happens, I start noticing something uncomfortable I don't want to name.

Now, I find myself unboxing my tassels and club pins or driving past old haunts and thinking of pulling my Gray Honda Accord into my old parking spot in the student Lot, spot 77, just in front of the baseball field and two spots down from the poplar tree. I even drive by my friend's Nicole's house. I used to pick her up at 6:45am everyday of Senior year.

She's not there anymore.

I rarely see her.

I start noticing a sense of dread – maybe not dread its more nostalgic, more regretful than that...But I wear that feeling like well-worn Vans now. I can't seem to toss them aside even though the sole is split from the shoe. My heels are rubbed bloody by the frames of shoes that no longer fit and I continue to ignore it. It chafes me, the knowledge that soon my high school, that monument of adolescence will fall and bury oh so many ties to my teenage years with it. Like a forsaken reliquary of by-gone friendships.

I used to see them EVERYDAY.

Kai, Noah, Emma, Katie, Ciara, Grace, Renee,

There are so many others.

That Brick Box is a trigger. It tickles so many memories: good, bad and so many categories in-between that even a Venn diagram couldn't suffice.

Should I go back? See it one more time before the school is gone?

The last time I visited my high school was my freshman year of college. My twin sister and our high school friend Ciara broke onto the football field to sit, drink and reminisce about high school ex's, ex best friends, and the teacher's we loved, and the one's we couldn't stand. Half an

hour in a light beam suddenly flashed around disturbing our reverie with panic. We climbed over the wire fence to crouch behind trash cans and the concession stand to peer out at who it was before we ran to the far end, scaled and fell off the 6-foot fence and ran into the woods backing the field where I promptly yanked the glass bottle of evidence into the woods to mingle with the shards of its likewise discarded friends from over the years.

My best friend, Emma, for 4 years who hid in bathrooms with me for 3 years straight and handed me my first joint. We spent every weekend together.

Sam, Zack, Tammy and Jake: the people who I used to sit with in IB Film every other day for two years. Who I went to Ghibli fest with and with whom I shot short movies on the weekends.

Renee and Katie, who I went to Homecoming and Prom with junior and senior year. We'd go meet up at Chick fila, IHop, or Goodwill and end up talking for hours.

There are so many people who had such a hand at shaping who I am now and now it is like they don't exist. They are not in my life now or in my thoughts(usually). And I'm sure I'm not in theirs. But for years we spoke every day. That knowledge hurts in a way I never expected. Like a dull barb wire sitting underneath my heart. Poking and potentially puncturing it once in a while.

There are memories encased in glass in the back of my mind that I only see when they reflect light from tangible things. Things like a building, like conversations, and photos I

don't have. I wonder if I'll lose them, forget them if I don't have that physical building acting as a trigger for them anymore. I know why I don't talk to most of those people anymore. I remember the ghosting, the falling outs, the growing apart of it all. It's just funny how in some ways they know me and still impact me to this day, and they won't ever know or care. The way they knew me that version of me doesn't exist in the same way and I know the same is true of them.

We aren't 15,16,17,18, anymore. We aren't the same people and there's a reason we haven't kept in contact when I'm still close with others. I just didn't think it'd turn out that way back then.

There aren't directories for the students in the yearbook you know and even if you can hit them up, message them, whatever, most wouldn't respond. They're not in high school anymore. They aren't dwelling on the past. I don't want to dwell either that's too close to sulking. I'm a firm believer in living and letting go so that we can continue to grow and evolve. It's just that these people had such an impact on how I grew and yet they aren't in my life.

I'm home again. I pulled off I-97 south onto veterans Highway and I was home again in minutes. Past the freshly laid concrete smothering what used to be Papa John's farm. I pull into my driveway and sit there. The engine is idling. Soft words pour out of the stereo to knock on my chest. Bruno Majors sings sweetly in my ear,

“Children cry and laugh and play

Slowly hair will turn to grey

We will smile to end each day

In places we won't walk."

It's too much.

My car turns over and I'm driving.

I'm driving towards closure.

I know that I won't find it not really. It's not ever the *thing* is it that provides closure. It's the memories and connections. The relationship you have with them and people. Still, I visit my school again. I need to I need control over when the last time I was there turns into The Last Time. That symbol permits me a sense of physical closure. At least to serve as a stopgap for the ache left behind by conversations I won't (can't) have any longer.

Those by-gone relationships.

I can't go back, back to those constant friends and the easy way we were within the walls of that Brick Box. Yet, my car is idling again parked in front of,

"Old Mill  Patriots".

and building's the same as ever. But I'm stuck grappling with the incongruency of it all. It's still here. Those people are not. They've moved on. I know that that's just life. Most people and places will leave their mark on you and then they're gone. So, I'll keep waiting for the next, and the next. I'll cherish them while I can and try not to take for granted the tides of life as they come in and out, or to regret the mark they leave behind.