

Opinion

My View

Back to school — a time of nostalgia

By Tara Lynn Johnson
Staff Reporter

Yellow buses are beginning to chug up and down Delaware roads, burping black smoke as they go at a snail's pace.

Driving through the neighborhood in the morning, I see girls on the corner in their newest fashions, their hair in curls, their bookbags crisp and clean, waiting for their ride.

It's back to school time.

"Already?" children say.

Not soon enough for many parents, like the one in that office supply store commercial with the dad gleefully buying school supplies for his unhappy children while singing "It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year."

In my case, it would be reversed. I always enjoyed the beginning of a new school year. I didn't love being at school all day long, and by June I was ready for vacation, but there's almost nothing better than new school supplies.

I still go to the store each August and walk the aisles looking at folders with animals or popular cartoon characters, book covers and notebooks of various styles. I especially liked the marble covered or spiral ones, which still get dented or destroyed within 10 minutes of getting them home. We can put people on the moon, but can't create a spiral notebook ring that won't bend?

One day, I'll torture my children with endless stories of my first day of school ... like having to stand in size order which always put me at the back of the line. My mother still tells stories of going to school in rural North Carolina — ignoring my eye rolls, sighs of repetition, and mouthing her exact words: "She was the first one on the bus, the last one off." I know, Mom.

The beginning of a new school year brings back lots of memories. My nostalgia was so bad one year that my husband bought me a bouquet of pens because I was sad I couldn't go back to school. He also appreciates my lifelong fetish for all stationery supplies — I love opening new packs of paper, sharpening new pencils by hand and filling in blank boxes on my new 16-month academic style calendar.

I also love anything that signals a new beginning. A clean slate with limitless possibilities. Think of all that could be accomplished.

The new school year brings classes offering challenges and chances to discover new skills and untapped brain power. You never know what will happen or what you'll find out about your abilities.

It wasn't until seventh grade English



Tara Lynn Johnson on the first day of first grade.

that I discovered I had a talent for writing, and, thankfully, my teacher recognized and encouraged it.

The new school year introduces people to teachers they might remember for their whole lives. Those teachers delight in sparking interest in their students and effortlessly encourage learning.

I had a few of those in the parochial schools I attended in Pennsylvania. Those teachers found something worthwhile in each child — whether they were "A" students or not. They taught me to be patient, to have pride in my work and to celebrate my accomplishments.

I had many teachers in my lifetime, but can vividly remember Mr. Sayers in his too-big suits running around the class trying to get us as excited as he was to be there; Sister Elsa and her bright white smile and endless words of praise; Sister Rose and her cranky, creaky voice always offering constructive advice; and Miss Lekic, who loved singer Engelbert Humperdinck and who pushed me to excel.

Unlike many children, back to school didn't mean a whole new wardrobe for me. Private schools love uniforms so every day I pulled out the maroon, gray and white jumper with matching blouse, tie, socks and saddle shoes. To this day, I blame that for my attraction to burgundy and my inability to be creative with fashion.

But, I'd suffer that again for the chance to open a new English textbook — the spine creaking as I revealed its smooth, white, untouched pages for the first time — to learn about the basics of writing, grammar and spelling which help me create pictures with words and express my thoughts in an eloquent and artistic way. Oh, and let's not forget the new pencil case, lunchbox, glue stick and binder.