

# DON'T TAKE SMILEY AWAY

*By Fred Hobbs*

The White House, the Taj Mahal, the Notre Dame Cathedral. All iconic structures that offer up reactions, if not emotions, of majesty, beauty and even awe. Why can a structure made of assorted building materials--wood, stone, brick, glass—often evoke sentimental attachment and fond memories? By what criteria are favorite buildings chosen?

To many folks, not just architectural features, but what goes on inside a building determine how it is viewed. Very few prisons are among anyone's favorite buildings. Conversely, campuses of colleges and universities point with pride at the enhancement of the academic and social experience provided by handsome buildings, beautiful grounds and just the right amount of ivy on the walls of their buildings.

Tasked with writing about a favorite building, I offer not a palace, not a museum, nor a university library. This story is about a junior high school or as a sixth through eighth grade facility is now called...middle school. My favorite building is William H. Smiley Middle School in Denver's Park Hill, named after a Harvard-educated teacher who had served as principal of Denver's prestigious East High School and later as superintendent of all of Denver's public schools. Of course, I attended Smiley as did our children, so I admit to a fair amount of pride in this place.

Built in 1928 at a cost of \$470,000, the building was constructed of red brick in a neo-Tudor style with twin cupolas resembling minarets. Writer Phil Goldstein in his book, "Park Hill Promise," described Smiley in its heyday of the 1930s and 40s as projecting the aura of "an extra special place, far and away the city's premier junior high."

The Smiley building still projects that image, though changing community patterns have altered dramatically what goes on within its walls. Today, Smiley is struggling for a viable solution to its future after several attempts by parent groups, teachers and the Denver Public Schools administration. Years of school leadership changes, a constant decline in enrollment coupled with student and parent dissatisfaction now have led to a decision by the Denver school board to close Smiley by 2015.

All hands assure, however, that the beautiful building will remain. Two schools are interested in taking over the campus. One group wants to run an innovative middle school program there and another charter school would like to move a burgeoning language immersion program to the facility adding to the current elementary school curriculum the inclusion of upper grades.

When the Smiley building was expanded years ago, I was given a chunk of concrete from an existing part of the school. One side was smoothed and polished and an inscription was added taking note of my interest in the school. It appears I won't have to grab another souvenir before a wrecking ball hits this impressive historical structure.

And I hope a bronze bust of William H. Smiley in the hallway by the main entrance will remain there, so future students can continue the longtime, if slightly irreverent, custom of rubbing Dr. Smiley's nose for good luck on exams.

Please don't take Smiley away!