

SETTING THE STAGE

In 2 short months, my younger child will start ninth grade at the local public high school, making a transition from a small charter middle school. As we talk about the transition, I'm reminded of my own similar transition, going from eighth grade in a small Catholic school (with 37 students in the class) to a relatively large ninth grade (400 in the class) in a much larger building with a much larger staff.

I vividly remember my first day. I remember a fight with my mom over what I was going to wear (she vetoed my miniskirt). I remember walking by my old school and smelling the lilacs in full bloom. I remember having trouble finding my locker and my homeroom. I remember a senior meeting me in the cafeteria and helping me to figure out where my second-period class was. I remember my math teacher teasing me and my being mortified—my name on his class roster showed up as “Dathie,” and he insisted on calling me that all year.

Although my memories are vivid, my reading of the memory literature strongly suggests to me that some parts of these memories might be wrong. For example, lilacs bloom in the spring; my first day of ninth grade was in September. It's unlikely that I smelled lilacs on that particular day simply because they wouldn't have been in bloom. My mom and I had several disputes about appropriate clothing choices for school; whether or not one of them happened on that particular day is less clear. Ditto the issue of my math teacher calling me by the incorrect “Dathie” moniker (which, by the way, continued to be mortifying the