

## DIRECTIONS FOR GETTING HOME FROM SCHOOL

Exit school by the gym doors through which I could hear a reassuring teacher's aide on E's first day of kindergarten and where they sold baked goods on Election Day until that got outlawed.

Turn right toward the tall, lone pine that leaned southward in search of its long-gone brethren and where the parking garages arced like a parade of listing dominoes.

Walk past the playhouses and mosaics and watch for D&S through the Montessori windows.

At the T in the path, go straight toward the gate if the weather is bad or there's karate, soccer and/or gymnastics practice.

Open the gate, being careful not to let any dogs in or out. There shouldn't be any to let out because they're not supposed to be on the school grounds. And there shouldn't be any to let in, either, for the same reason, but you never know.

Go right if it's an ice cream kind of day.

*What kind of day isn't an ice cream kind of day?* is a fair question to which there is never a satisfying answer.

Head to the corner shop, being careful when crossing the school driveway which everyone knows is a hazard of distracted drivers. And the driveway after that, too.

At the corner where the unfamiliar crossing guard with an unremarkable rain ensemble holds forth, turn into the sandwich shop on the right.

Once you've had your fill of ice cream, or you can juggle the spoon, paper cup and your backpack all at once, retrace your steps to the gate, being careful when crossing the driveway before the school driveway which everyone knows is a hazard of distracted drivers.

If it isn't an ice cream kind of day (*let's be honest: most days*), go left.

Walk past the blue and yellow playground screened by wooden planters that brim with "pizza gardens" too late in the school year to do anyone any good, where M took your pictures for USA Today when digital cameras were a new thing that needed testing.

Watch out for planes approaching from the north and disappearing behind the office building across the street where I work and can see the playground from my desk. Ever since 9/11 we regard those planes with a certain degree of distrust; we know what can happen.

If the weather is good and there isn't karate, soccer and/or gymnastics, turn right where the portables were painted with sunflowers (I think).

Head onto the blacktop where S honed his backflip and E learned to ride and I gossiped (just a little!) and kids line up for fire drills, but definitely not for active shooter exercises.

The blue and yellow playground is fair game, even if the Extended Day kids are there, except for the roller slide. They took that away because it might pinch little fingers.

You can play here for as much as an hour, weather, friends, homework and parental patience permitting.

Leave via the big gate where the maintenance vehicles enter. Turn right.

Check out the few remaining "State Trees" that cling to the fence-line in the northeast corner of the playground. Now might be the time to finally look up which represents what state, circa 1940 when they were donated. *Is the larch still alive?*

At the corner, wait for the nice crossing guard with the awesome rain ensemble. At her whistle, follow her into the street to cross either K Blvd. or V St., depending on the light and maybe her mood, it's sometimes hard to tell.

If you cross K Blvd., wait in the shade under the string bean tree whose pods crunch beneath your feet and stain the sidewalk.

If you cross V St., wait in the elements and marvel at the stunningly cavalier adults who just walk right into the street without any regard for their own safety or the nice crossing guard with the awesome rain ensemble.

Watch for lions, and tigers, and bears - *oh, my!*- as well as the rare raging rhinoceros rampaging down the block. Dodge right and left, as necessary, to avoid carnage.

Pass J's apartment where they get to play Nintendo any time they want.

Pass the big hedge behind which people regularly insist there is no house, but you know otherwise because it's yours. Turn right.

Skip down the brick step into the yard - and you're home!

Distance: 1.5 blocks, 2 if you get ice cream.