

Two-room schools are as rare as white bluejays. Canyon has both. The jay bullies the smaller songbirds, for first pick at the lunch crumbs on the rear porch. In turn the screams, of the running children at recess, chase the jay up through the branches. The school itself stands still in time, it seems. Built in 1918, its dark walls milled from fallen trees at the bottom of the canyon, the school blends into the redwood forest.

Redwoods need little care. Children need much, but the woods are relatively safe and forgiving. With 250 people in 56 houses scattered on the hillsides, it's hard to get lost. Following the stream or the slope of the land always leads somewhere. Keeping up with the world outside requires more constant attention.

Uniquely isolated, 26 miles from downtown San Francisco, Canyon is the last rural community within this urban center, but life in the redwood canyon is diverse, changing. Indeed Canyon is a microcosm of the world around it.

Still there's the difference: redwoods dwarf most anxieties, the forest enchants with its peace, nature creates slowly, it sets people apart, lets each be more himself. Of course canyons are also teacups: porcelain gossip surrounds everyone, the brittle chatter is always there. The seasons have special influence though. They bind everyone — artists and farmers, the inheritors and the disinherited, engineers and treetoppers, the upwardly mobile and the poor — in common preoccupation.

The school does also. It roots the community. By law, people can't live here without the school. Canyon is a designated watershed, but educational structures have precedence. Otherwise the community could be forced from the woods by the water company.

Now though hawks glide above the houses. A white jay plays in the stream bed. An alphabet block divides the shallow water. A pencil snaps off in a tree. Melika's learning to read her kindergarten diploma.

Nature grows children slowly. Redwoods teach too. We've emancipated ourselves from the garden of magic.

Always it exists here. Still, time never stops, only the photograph.