Memories of back to school

School is back in session, a sure sign that another summer season has flown by.

This year all four of my grandsons will be in school, with the oldest in eighth grade and the youngest starting kindergarten.

Seems like only yesterday that our youngest grandson’s father was just starting school himself. I remember the day well. Ross wore a fresh pair of sneakers and a mixed look of excitement and fear. Surrounded by a moving sea of Jurassic Park and Barney backpacks, he was quiet and still amidst the hubbub.

My wife Sherry and I knelt down to give him some words of encouragement and he turned to us and gave us hugs.

Somewhere, buried in a box of old photos, I’m pretty sure we have a first-day-of-school photo. I was reminded of that with lots of social media posts of kids and grandkids returning to school. If my folks had ever taken a back-to-school photo, it would have remained on the roll of film until I would have been in the next grade. One didn’t just rush into developing film.

My back-to-school memories are faded, but whenever I see school supplies in a store I think back to the days when it was exciting to get ready for another year. New notebooks, pens and pencils – even a new 16-pack crayons – was a fresh start.

I wrote a story about Ross’s first day of school back in 1993. I read it again to refresh my memory.

As we stood next to Ross, I thought about how quickly the past five years have gone. No longer was he a baby, an infant or a toddler. He was a boy going to school.

Is he ready? How will he do? Will he like it? He's so shy; will he make friends?

These and other questions popped into my mind as the older kids started filing into the school. If only I knew.

It was the teacher who saved the day. She greeted him warmly, pinned on his name tag and asked him about his third-grade sister and what he thought about the hot weather. He nodded his head and said a few words.

I knew he was scared and trying to be brave. I felt his hand squeezing mine a little harder.

Then she asked him if he would do her a favor. Could he help her be the leader and bring the rest of the kids into the school?

Ross' face brightened, and he lifted his head with a nod.

I knew that everything would be fine.

It was.

I salute all of the teachers, educators, aides, bus drivers and all those men and women who are entrusted with our precious cargo. Other than parenting and daycare providers, I’m pressed to think of a more important job.

Ross’s kindergarten teacher has long since retired, but she’s still living in the community.

Last winter when I was just a few days out of hip surgery and out shoveling the sidewalk, she pulled over and gave me a polite scolding.

“You shouldn’t be doing that,” she said.

She was right.

I was always a slow learner.