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## Teaching Memories

It was wartime and the country didn't have everything, but we did not ask for a lot. June 1944 came and it was my turn to write and hope for an interview from some of those little towns around Iowa that needed home economics teachers. D-Day had just passed with all of us at Iowa State graduating without taking a single final test. That foggy 6 a.m. morning when the notice came campus-wide that the American invasion on the beaches of Normandy had indeed occurred, classes over the nation were cancelled since so many thousands of families would have members on that mighty thrust.

Amid all the graduation and end-of-the-year activities (I gave my five-pound engagement announcement party since tradition had it that you shared a five pound box of chocolates with your sorority or dorm sisters, along with theme party) I received a notice that I had an interview at Buffalo Center, a small town near the Minnesota border. A friend who had a car (just think!) took several of us to our respective little town interviews.

I remember I wore a hat and gloves to the interview which turned out to be not an interview at all, but just the superintendent showing me around the department and the school, I guess assuming it was a cut and dried situation that I had the job. The department had 3 rooms, the kitchen, a class room, and a social or homey room like a living room where the finer "cultural" learning would take place. I remember the panic when I looked at the teacher's desk and realized it was MINE and not one of those little student desks anymore.

Then it was home to the Black Hills for the summer where I suddenly crammed all the practical things I could think of into those 2 months – things with which I wished I had more experience before facing those students.

August came with me taking off for my first teaching job since I was vocational and was hired for 10 months instead of 9. This meant I was supposed to be available for adult education work if so desired. My salary was \$185 dollars a month and you were hired just for 10 month. So I was making as much as the superintendent who was hired for 9 months. Since I did not have a car (along with most everyone else), I took the train. The only train ever coming into Buffalo Center was a freight train so I smilingly rode the caboose with the crew the last 80 miles into Buffalo Center, to the everlasting joking of everyone who knew about it. Mr. Smith, the superintendent was very chagrined and said I should have called from Forest City so he could come for me.

I found a little upstairs room with THE banker and his wife, who also sold insurance. (That's the policy that has long been paid up and now gives me dividends). Breakfast I took in my room with the glass milk bottle sitting in my window all day. Lunch was at school and dinner at night was at the one café in town. This town, by the way, was considered one of the wealthiest around since its bank had deposits of over a million!

In addition to the 4 or 5 home economics classes, I don't remember which, I taught a freshman general science class which included all the freshmen of the school. It

was a 30 some class and had boys who then never took home economics. There was no such thing as special education classes, you just had levels of capabilities. You certainly did not label anyone as anything different. The school was a consolidated school which meant the bus picked up from a wide area. The total enrollment for the high school was 200.

As it happened, the new music teacher and I became quite a pair and started singing for everything that came along, including church doings at the Methodist church where the young minister and his wife were very into the youth activities of the town. The minister's wife was a good pianist and often, or nearly always, accompanied us singing duets. Or sometimes the music teacher would accompany me in solo work. The minister and I sang duets and I thought we sounded like Nelson Eddy and Jeanette McDonald, he made things sound so good! The music teacher and I spent nearly every evening over at the school practicing and also recording. The minister had a recording system where you recorded and cut your own disk, brushing away the cuttings as you sang. You had to keep those cutting off or you mumbled up the recording. Thus we redid quite often. I still have my records of such wonderful songs as White Cliffs of Dover and all those 40's hits.

The music teacher and I were asked to be junior class advisors which of course means the banquet and prom. Also the scouts, led by the Methodist minister had lots of musical things for us to do throughout the year. There were anniversaries and you name it to keep us singing several times a week.

It was a strict Baptist town with no dancing at all in the town, so the students went to a nearby town that had a great outdoor pavilion. But with our practice after school and evenings at the school, the kids ended up dancing to our singing practice since the music teacher was good at all piano works.

Shortly after school started, the superintendent wanted me to start a school lunch program since the teacher before had not seen fit to start one. (Had I just been as astute as she) I was to cook the lunch for those 200 with my foods class! Well, the cafeteria was in the basement which meant I spent half the time down there with kids overseeing the food while the students upstairs worked on their own for certain periods of time. This went on too long when I finally told the superintendent that I needed cooks full time down there and separate from my classes. Somehow I found two capable, willing ladies. How lucky I was. There was no refrigerator and during wartime the possibility of acquiring one required enormous red tape. I did the menu, buying, making the tickets and taking each every day and all the bookwork. I charged 15 cents and the government reimbursed each ticket sold too so I did make out OK on funding the program.

The grocer where I bought the school food couldn't do enough for me, even getting meat which in wartime was miracle. As a PR gesture, I guess, the home ec classes gave the school board and their wives (women didn't serve on school boards for heavens sake) a fancy dinner and I had steak which I guess some of the board didn't think was right in light of shortages and patriotism in wartime. We decorated in blue and silver Stardust theme for the banquet.

The students did all the cooking and I sat out with the guests. I think I went back into the kitchen only once to "rescue" something. I nevertheless was very nervous.

Then came April after a terribly cold, snowy winter and the shocking news that President Roosevelt died April 12<sup>th</sup>. The war was at a very touchy state even with the

invasion over a year before. For days the radio played funeral dirges only 20 hours a day. No TV then so we kept our radios on forever. Movie newscasts had shown the President looking just terrible for months so we all hoped against hope.

School had just settled down after all this, when 8 days later I came home from a long practice session at school (about midnight) to see a light on in my “home”. I knew it was something for me since the old couple never stayed up late. When I came in the lady said I was to call home as my father had died. So I called home at that hour which was unheard of in that day because the telephone lady never stayed past 5 in her office. But that dear lady, a family friend, had stayed in that little office in Hermosa until she got my call. So I walked back over to the place the music teacher stayed and asked her to find someone to be a substitute for me. Then the lady of the house offered to take me to the nearest train which was way up in Austin, MN at 4 a.m. I will never forget her help. Of course it was a 24 hour ride on the train, with my forever motion sickness every time I rode anywhere. My brother in Navy, was flown home by the Red Cross.

So it was the hired man and my mother to keep the registered Hereford herd going.

Back at school, May 8<sup>th</sup> arrived so soon with the great news that it was VE day or victory in Europe – the war there was over!

Then, as school neared the end, came the junior-senior banquet (no dance of course). My cafeteria ladies came through magnificently with a super meal. We even built a stairway on which I stood and sang “Stairway to the Stars” and “A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody”.

The end of school did not signal my departure. I was to work for 2 weeks to make the 10 months. Some fine farm lady gave me her red beet crop to save for cafeteria use the next year. So what could I do but can them and it came out to be nearly 600 quarts!!! Right in the middle of this one day a 4-H (yes, I was roped into being the leader) came to school and wanted me to come to the library downtown for a minute. She needed some help. You know what you look like when you are in the middle of canning RED BEETS. I looked like somebody had tried to murder me. When I arrived at the library here were the 4-H girls and their mothers who had built an elaborate throne for me to sit on for a bridal shower for me!! Since they knew I was being married in the summer and would be going way out to Maryland, they gave money instead of gifts. I had always dressed very professionally when students or parents would see. Well, my little cotton housedress bespattered with red beets was my gown on the throne.

The year ended with all those canned beets available (I wonder if they ever used them) and \$600 in the cafeteria account and a refrigerator after 7 copies of umpteen forms sent into as many government bureaus. So I felt as though I had made it through my first year reasonably well.

A summer helping ranching with my Dad gone and plans for my wedding where he would not be walking me down the aisle.

I did not teach that first semester the next year after just being married and by the time the next fall arrived we were in Hartford, CT. I did substitute teaching in various schools there for the first semester. One was a black school with the chattiest little girls I have ever seen. There was a big stalwart policeman stationed every 50 feet or so around the whole area. My husband did not know if he wanted me to go back there or not. I had no trouble though. Then I taught in an “opportunity school” which today we would call a

special education school. They were not labeled, just given a chance to go to this helpful school. I remember one boy making double boiler oatmeal put the salt in the bottom pan of water. They were a bunch to handle.

The last semester the state home economics head found a permanent job for me at 2 West Hartford schools, Noah Webster and West Middle which were in the elite part of town. I took the bus to each two and a half days a week at each. Both buildings were of pillared New England architecture of red brick. It was home economics for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades this time. The remembrance of those schools is how early those girls started planning for Vasser and such schools. They took summer courses every summer from the finished high school. The festivities and money spent on those graduation exercises from 8<sup>th</sup> grade (all in white) was striking. There was one black girl who had moved into the community and that caused a lot of worry among the teachers and parents. (Now in 2007 it is a black city).

Now we take a big jump of 29 years during which I did my teaching in 4-H and helping with extension work in these 3 counties – Custer, Pennington and Fall River. And raising a boy and 4 girls on my ranch which my husband thought was better than the rat race of the engineering of the East coast.

In 1964, with 3 children in 3 different states in college I found it advisable to put my name on the substitute list in Rapid City. This I did for 2 years when in April of 1966, Superintendent Dr. Lindly called me and asked if I could take the special education position at Roosevelt School which that year had been decreed as separate school for special education, a new concept just being tried out. As I told him, I had taught only a few days in the “opportunity” school in Hartford as my only special education practice. So I spent the week with the retiring teacher who was an airbase lady needing to move with her husband. I decided I could handle the position so finished out the year where upon Dr. Lindly asked if I wanted to spend the summer renewing my certificate to teach full time the next year. So I planned a big shake-up by leaving. It was the first summer our son was to be gone to ROTC in WA. Oldest daughter taken a job in tourist business in the Hills so 16 year old Rhonda would be in charge of the little girls, 11 and 8 keeping house and cooking for Dad and hired help. Since we had all been so busy running the ranch it was almost too much to think of losing all 3 of us helping in one summer. But we each took the plunge and I went to Brookings for the summer. Taught the next year and did “student teaching” in special education the next summer by working at the Black Hills Workshop that summer.

From then on it was building a tight ship for special ed. Students with the 6 teachers without a principal in our school, but with Ethel Bridgeford, the special education head being sure we all kept together in our thinking and planning by having a monthly meeting for all special education teachers. I developed a plan whereby all students could have home economics each year with variety, child development, consumer education, foods in management so that by the end of the usual 4 – 6 years we had each student in junior and senior high, a good “living” background was learned, I hoped. We had a big style show each year with a different theme each year and everyone modeled their sewing projects which really amounted to quite a show. One year it was Rainbow, another “Little Women” where they came out from behind huge books labeled “Little Women” (made from cardboard refrigerator boxes painted). Another was walking on the gangplank to a boat. The students made the refreshments for the parents and

people who came to see this. They even learned how to make cream cheese mints for each year. Then soon after would be the graduation ceremony where they again made the refreshments for that festivity and I would drill the bunch who wanted to sing on some fitting graduation music. It was a fast change from directing the last song and then being in the kitchen to help get the food show on immediately. It was fun.

Then came a change when we moved to Jefferson School, still about the same bunch of teachers, and a new young special education head, Rick Scheiber whom we thought as a school psychologist only 29 years old would not be able to handle such a daunting job. But in no time we knew he listened to what we said and what we did not say and acted in our best interests. We were building a real tight ship when the new Central was built and it was decreed that special education would now be back with the regular students but with their own classes. It was a big change for our tight family of teachers and we saw advantages and disadvantages. I never had the style shows, teas, graduation ceremonies to do. So 1977 saw the big new school open in February and special joining the group. Three of us shared the 3 room home economics area from then on to 1990 when I retired as did one of the regular home economics teachers. Special education home economics has not had a special teacher since.

One of the highlights for me (and I hope the students) was to take the seniors the first Saturday after graduation out to my ranch for a day of learning and of course a big dinner before coming back to town at the end of the day. One little gal even bought a new real Stetson hat for the occasion. Lots of friends of graduates wanted to come with their friends but I told them when they graduated and then only could they come. My husband would plan some ranch chore all could take part in so they felt they really learned ranching!! One girl wanted to be hired so we went in and picked her up all summer and she helped until December when cold weather made it too hard to carry on. She did not take on any job by herself but was with one of us at all times.

During these years I taught a class not part of home economics such as science, English, History, LD study skills, Government, one period a day.

One particularly good class was an LD biology class where I team taught the LD students with a regular biology teacher who, by the way, was the best. We developed a really good situation for 10 years and after we both retired, the students were just sprinkled among the regulars. Too bad.

Looking back, I decided in high school to be a home ec teacher, one reason being I thought lab work would be such a help in developing interest in a subject, English and history might be hard to keep an hour going, I reasoned in my immature days. The biggest disappointments are mostly disciplinary situations. I still get big greetings from former students of as far back as 30 years who are so tickled to tell me their accomplishments as a result of their school learning.

Though we are the lowest paid teachers in the nation, my starting salary of \$1850 in Iowa to my ending salary of around \$26,000 a year is something I would have never dreamed of back in 1945.

A special note I wish to tell is that in 1939 at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of statehood, Miss Kreiger was instrumental in getting us all to dress up in Rapid City high school for the occasion. This was the 50<sup>th</sup> graduating class of Rapid City, too. Since I had a chance to wear Mrs. Gossage's wedding dress, the elders of the city who voted the best costumed chose me for the senior girl. Now Mrs. Gossage was a pioneer lady who

helped Rapid City up by its boot straps. She was the wife of the man who published the first newspaper in 1878 before SD was a state. It was a weekly to start with and she knew nothing of the business so washed the towels and folded the papers. But over the years with her husband's health declining she learned the whole business and was awarded of note throughout the area. She had her own Salvation Army help by having the journal office a place where people could drop off clothing etc. She found who needed and took it to them herself. She was a great church worker. She was the eldest child of the famous Bower family band which played through the Hills. The "One and Only Family Band" was a movie made of this 10 member band. So I was really privileged to wear this and be photographed with the other winners as I sat 'playing' an old organ.

Fifty years later I was teaching in Rapid City Central, (Once a Cobbler, always a Cobbler) and planning on retiring from teaching that year of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of statehood and the 100<sup>th</sup> graduating class of Rapid City Central. So I bought material as close to that brownish, greenish cloth Alice Gossage had so carefully made, looked at my pictures in her dress, went to the Sioux Museum where the dress now displayed on a mannequin was and made a replica to wear that day in school in honor of 100 years of statehood. I did have 100 year old lace I used on the bustle, sleeves and collar. I did use Velcro instead of the 11 buttonholes she did on hers. I wore my grandmother's old brooch and some earrings I made of my grandmother's copper horseshoe cuff links with the pewter four-leaf clover in the center and the 7 nails in the horseshoe. A special day for me. The Rapid City Journal came up and took a picture of me seated 'playing' the piano and put it on the front page of November 2, 1989, 100 anniversary of statehood. Wish Miss Kreiger could have been there . .

#### Specialty Activity

In 1976 one of the Rapid City High School teachers started a small reception for seniors and their mothers (and family members if desired) of a tea after school in the late spring weeks. After moving over to the new big Central which it was now called, I participated by providing cookies, helping in the kitchen or whatever their desire. After this one teacher retired, I assumed the leadership and for the next 20 some years it developed into quite a party with most seniors and their families joining for the afternoon where we had punch, cookies and I always made 200 – 400 red mortarboard mints and 200 – 400 white diploma shaped mints. The music department provided the short entertainment and the whole cafeteria area was turned over to the visiting festivities. After I retired no one took over the tea production so it is no more.