

“What am I doing here?”

By Ted Kneebone

I stood there looking south to Central Building, “What am I doing here?” That was early August 1955 after the graduation ceremony. Later that month I stood at the end of the long sidewalk leading to Wilmot school. “What am I doing here? I’m not ready to teach.”

I faced my first English class, a group of 25 freshmen, and wondered the same thing. That first year was a really traumatic one for me. None of the courses I had taken at Northern State Teachers College taught me how to handle discipline. There were three English classes and one in journalism. I had never had a course in journalism and had never been on a newspaper staff. There was declam twice a year, the junior class play, advising the newspaper editor, a study hall, and the library. The newspaper editor was quite experienced and knew what to do, so she didn’t need my advice.

At the end of each day I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I was seldom home from work until about 5:00 or 6:00 pm, and to bed before 1:00 or 2:00 am. My wife saw me a few hours a day, but I was grading papers. She might as well have been married to a typewriter!

The second year was not any better. At Groton, I taught four classes of English, coached declam and the junior class play, and was the librarian.

I needed help from the administration at both schools, but got none, and was too proud to ask for any. The following year, Northern’s head librarian hired me as an assistant librarian, with the promise that I would work on my master’s degree in library science. Summers I attended the University of Minnesota. During the school year 1959-60 I worked at the Northern library, and at home I did research for and wrote my thesis. Master’s was conferred in 1960. In September 1958, our son, Todd, was born.

Teaching at NSTC was fun. The students really wanted to learn about being librarians. It was something I looked forward to. And my responsibilities as reference, circulation, and curriculum librarian were just right for me. I also cataloged the music scores and records. When the boss, Robert Elftman, insisted on giving the grades in the courses I taught, that was the end. I was on the faculty from 1957 to the end of summer session 1960, then we moved to Lincoln, Nebraska.

My next stop was Nebraska Wesleyan University. I was only 26 years old. The administration gave me no support. After 6 years of struggle, we left to take up the duties of head librarian at Yankton College. Our daughter, Nancy, was born there in 1966. At YC, I got the chance to help plan the new library building. We moved into it the year before we moved to Pierre. In Pierre, I learned much about state government, wrote a speech for Governor



Richard Kneip, and drafted several bills that eventually became law, including one that resulted in the state's student intern program.

From 1973 to 1980, I was at a public library and two more university libraries in Illinois (Sangamon State) and Minnesota (Bemidji State). Doland High School needed an English teacher to start just before Christmas 1978. I found myself back in the high school classroom teaching six English classes and coaching the one-act plays. Over the past 20 years, the kids hadn't changed, but I had. Raising two of our own children made me a bit more understanding. At the end of the semester, I was invited back with a raise and did want to return, but did not want to continue commuting 120 miles round trip to Doland twice a week. And I would not ask my family to move from Aberdeen.

The best job in my career came when we moved back to Aberdeen, and I was hired at the SD School for the Blind & Visually Impaired. Here I found the work and the people who made the difference to me. The faculty, staff, and students really used the library. Before I came, the school had never had a librarian with the proper credentials. The faculty appreciated everything I did for them. The kids enjoyed my story time and the classes I taught. The school had had no stage plays for many years. In 1982, we restored one-act plays to our list of activities. I hosted a children's interview program in 1983-1984 on KGIM radio. There were many opportunities to read for the blind kids. I wrote a story for each of my kids in "story time." For one moment in time, each one was a hero or a heroine. My course called, "What's happening?" was a chance to introduce them both to the news of the day and the kind of radio programs I listened to as a kid.

I loved my work at the School, the kids, the teachers, and staff. Since retiring in 1998, I have continued to substitute. In 2000, I organized a small group of students into an acting troupe called the "Kids of the New Century." In my basement studio, we recorded several radio plays and downloaded them and photos to two websites. I plan to continue working with these students and recording plays.

Those last 18 years were the frosting on my cake.

My life since retirement has been anything but boring! In 2004, I ran for the state Senate, and in 2006 for the state House. St. Mark's Episcopal Church was without a priest from 2003 to 2006, so the lay people kept the church going. Volunteer work keeps me busy: Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities, Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee, Blind & Visual Impairment Support Group, and Headstart.

I maintain several websites and contribute to others. Whenever an amateur photographer is needed, I can do the work.

The people of Aberdeen have been good to me and my family. My life is full of joy and delight!