

## REMINISCENT TEACHER AWARD

By Marian Van Cleave

Winner Area Retired Teachers Association

My name is Marian Boerner Van Cleave. I graduated from Winner High School in 1957. It was always kind of understood that I would become a teacher. At that time there were Basically four career choices for women: housewife, nurse, secretary or teacher. I made the choice to go to Southern State Teachers College at Springfield, South Dakota.

I arrived on the college campus at the end of August, never having been away from home, seventeen and very "green". At that time you could get a one-year teaching certificate, which I opted for. Since there was a large number of students who were in the one-year program, prospective teachers were sent out each quarter to do their practice teaching. And that's how I found myself, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of college, on a little bus (stretch), heading out to a rural school with about 8 other students to do our practice teaching. We were supposed to observe for a week and then begin doing a little teaching. I had the misfortune of getting a first year teacher who had only been on the job for a couple of days. When we got there they were doing after-lunch-break activities. This happened to be singing and involved each student and the teacher singing verse by themselves. The gal that was practice teaching with me was an excellent singer, while I on the other hand had not been blessed with any musical ability. So my first 15 minutes at the school felt like a nightmare, only to get worse. After the music lesson, the teacher handed us lesson books and told us to teach the afternoon classes. That nearly ended my teaching career then and there. Needless to say I didn't get much out of practice teaching. I lost 10 pounds the first month of school. The one good thing about that quarter was that a flu epidemic hit the campus. I managed to get three different strains of the flu and was out for the last 2 weeks of the quarter. Even though I was delirious with the flu for most of that time, I at least got out of two weeks of practice teaching! It was then that I made the decision to get a two-year degree and grew to like my career choice.

My first year of teaching was at Onida, South Dakota. My salary for the year was \$2,900. I went there with a college friend, she was given the 5<sup>th</sup> grade position and I took the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. They were a good group of students. I think, however, that I learned more than they did that first year. I felt that the two years of education really hadn't prepared me for a lot of the work that a teacher had to do. There was a wonderful group of older teachers who took the first-year teachers under their wings and helped guide us through the year. They became very special to us for all the help they gave us. I also had a great group of parents. In that school each room had volunteer parents to help with any extra activities. They were a great help in that they planned and organized each party for every holiday, made costumes for the homecoming parade, etc. They would ask me what I would like to have done and then they would take care of everything. Wouldn't it be great if teachers today had that same kind of support since they are faced with so many more challenges. That was to be my only year of teaching at Onida. Don and I were married in June. We planned to live in Corsica where he had a job teaching in the high school and I was to teach at a rural school. My group of parents at Onida gave me a farewell party in the form of a bridal shower. I felt very fortunate to have had such a good first year of teaching.

My second year was at Walnut Grove, a rural one-room school located two miles from Corsica. I took a \$200 salary out, receiving only \$2,700 to teach all eight grades. That was quite a challenge to try to get all those classes done in a day. You definitely had to rely on the older students to help with the lower grades' lessons. This experience gave me a much greater appreciation for the teachers I had during my first eight spent in a rural school. My first grade teacher was Leatha Brozik, whom I "loved". I was also blessed during my 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade years to have had one of the "Best Teachers Ever", Alice Ekberg Kriz. I have many wonderful, happy memories of those days.

As a rural school teacher you also had a lot of other duties such as janitor, cook, maintenance person, nurse and sometimes even exterminator. Mice was the problem I had to face. My mother had given me some nice big plants to decorate my school. One morning when I arrived at school, I found that something had eaten every inch of those plants. I decided maybe it wasn't just mice! I was glad, however, that I didn't have to deal with rattle snakes which had been a problem in the rural school I attended as a child.

I had only been at Walnut Grove a couple of months when I found I was expecting. Due to complications with the pregnancy, my doctor told me I would have to quit my job. I hated to have to tell the school board that

I wouldn't be able to finish the school year. I did assure them that I wouldn't quit until they found a replacement. I continued to teach until after the Christmas holiday when a replacement was found. Two months later that teacher had to quit for the same reason. They found a 3<sup>rd</sup> teacher to finish the year. I later learned that she also became pregnant. (Something in the water perhaps!) During the time I taught at Walnut Grove, John F. Kennedy was elected president. There was a lot of apprehension in that community about electing a Catholic president for the first time and it was reflected in the children.

I had made the decision not to teach while our children were little. We spent our summers in Greeley, Colorado where Don was working on his Master's degree. Arriving back in Corsica the 3<sup>rd</sup> summer, I found that they hadn't been able to find the 5/6 grade combination teacher and had assume I would fill the position. I did go ahead and take the job with the understanding that they would continue looking for another teacher. About the middle of October a replacement was found. That was to be short-lived though. She was an older lady and couldn't handle the discipline. The children treated her badly, even locked her in the closet at times. I went back at Christmas time and finished the year. I received \$1,722 for those 5 months I taught. It was this group of children that aged me 20 or 30 years. We were working on estimations in math class and as an example I had them estimate my age and weight. I was 23 at the time but most of the children saw me as in my forties, the age of their parents. The weight was even worse!

My next teaching experience came when I started the kindergarten program in Armour, South Dakota. It started the 1<sup>st</sup> of February and went through the end of that school year. I was paid \$1,100. I enjoyed this experience. The classes were held in the basement of the county library. One of my students was a little red-haired boy who was as cute as a button but a little terror. He almost had me baffled as to what to do with him. He would yell, break, the other kids colors, hit, bite, etc. I turned around once to see him leaping into the sandbox scattering sand all over. The superintendent, his mother, and I had many conferences about what to do. I've often wondered what ever happened in his life. Hopefully it got better.

The rest of my teaching career was as a substitute teacher. This is a very difficult job as well. It isn't easy to walk into a different classroom each time, not knowing the students or where the materials are. And on some occasions you hoped you could just get through the day.

Though my teaching experience was limited, it made me have the greatest admiration for those teachers who have dedicated their lives to the education of children. My thanks and appreciation to all those who taught me and our children.