

When I was going to be a first grade student at the two-room country school called Newdale School, I was so excited. I loved the smell of the school and the books. It was very magical to me. I believe it was then that I decided to be a teacher. My mother was the upper class room teacher; so I didn't have her as my teacher, but I lived with her and my sister Patty in the school house during the week and went home when my dad would come on Friday evenings. During the depression, only one person could be employed; so that every family would have at least one member earning wages. The year my mom went back to teaching was the year anyone could become a wage earner. It was late in the summer when my mother found out she could teach, and the only school within driving distance was Newdale School. Since we only had one car (and my dad needed that for his job) we lived at the school. The basement was finished and each room had its own furnace. That community was very involved in PTA; so they had a full kitchen. We did this for two years. It was a wonderful experience for me. You might say I was immersed in the school setting.

Since my mother was a teacher and I sometimes was allowed to correct papers, get her room set up, and visiting her school when mine wasn't in session helped me in my decision to be a teacher. When I was a teenager, I taught Sunday School and really liked to teach.

I graduated from high school in 1954 and attended summer school at Yankton College. When the summer was just about over, I was approached by some friends on behalf of their friends, to consider teaching their country school in Nebraska. Nebraska still allowed people with 6 weeks of education to teach in their country schools. I turned it down because I knew I wasn't ready. I managed to finish two years at Yankton College in two summers and one regular year of college. I was granted a two-year certificate from the State of South Dakota, and I taught at the Gunderson School in Yankton County. I discovered I really wasn't ready then, but I had to get ready and I did.

The first thing that I loved about my first year was going to the County Superintendent's office and the wonderful smell of the books! After that I just knew it was going to be a great year.

My school was an old one-room school house with outdoor toilets and a well which had to be pumped for drinking water. The furnace in the basement wouldn't stoke so I would have to start the fire every morning. I had fourteen students and all grades but the seventh grade. I still refer to my students as kids, but I was just a kid myself. I was only 19 years old and a newlywed. I was very proud that my three first grade girls all received 99% on their end of the year tests, but I did have to call on the County Superintendent concerning an eighth grade math problem once. You had to be everything that was needed in a country school. You were the janitor, nurse, recess aid, counselor, music, art and P E teacher. But I liked it all with the exception of having to fire the furnace every day.

The Christmas program was really a big deal. I had the students write one of the plays. We made sets, learned verses, learned songs, rearranged the desks, and decorated. Everyone in the community came. I wasn't going to teach in that school the next year because of a few conflicts I had with one of the school board members. On the day of the school picnic, I was asked by one of the board members if I would meet with them in the basement. They had to meet because the grandparents of the students were furious with their sons for not rehiring me. So, we cut a deal. If they would put in new flooring, paint the inside, get new desks, get a new furnace, make sure the toilets were cleaned and give me a raise, I would consider it. They said they would and so I signed up for another year. Then in August I had to tell them I was expecting our first child, and at that time I couldn't teach and be pregnant. They were just furious because they had just

finished all the remodeling. Well, they invited me to their Christmas program and they were so very proud of all the improvements they had made.

Salaries were very low in those days. I made \$1,719.00 for that year. The only people who thought that wasn't a low salary was the school board.

I did some substitute teaching at the Meckling Consolidated school for a few years and taught their six week Kindergarten program one year. But in order for me to teach in the Vermillion Public Schools, I would have to go back to school, and I wasn't ready to do that.

After our fifth child was born and I was working full time at one of the local banks, I decided to go back to school. I took classes on my noon hours, which the bank allowed, and took classes at night. I did this for two years. The third year I quit work, took out a loan, and went to school full time. I was blessed that my young family and my husband were so cooperative and helpful. I graduated from the University of South Dakota with one of my first grade girls from Gunderson School.

Again I was blessed to be the only elementary teacher hired in the Vermillion Public School System. My salary was a little better. I believe I started at \$7,300.00. I was hired to teach first grade, which I taught for 13 years and then taught third grade for ten years. When I retired from full time teaching, I didn't know if I would be a substitute teacher or not. I finally did that a few months later and did substitute teaching for ten more years. I wasn't finished with education yet for I sat on the House of Representative Education committee for four years, and hopefully benefited to some degree the teaching profession.

When I started teaching in Vermillion, they had a janitor to take care of the building and furnace. I didn't have to teach art, music, or P E, but I did have recess duty.

Students today come to school with the same expectations to learn how to read, do math etc., as the students in the past. I have learned that children do what is expected of them most of the time. Those who don't have always and will continue to make problems for the other students and teachers. I believe that parents hurt their child when they try to make life in school easier than it should be. I'm glad that we have meals available for children who can't afford to buy them or bring them to school.

I believe it was a privilege to be a teacher even though sometimes I was yelled at, called names and wasn't appreciated, but those times were few and far between. There is nothing like going somewhere and have a young adult tell someone in a tone which showed approval, that you were one of their teachers.

Donna Schafer
Vermillion, SD