

TEACHING EXPERIENCES

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I graduated from Interior High School in May 1956 and attended college at, what was then called, Black Hills Teachers College. I did my student teaching with the second grade at the elementary school on campus. That was when I fell in love with teaching reading. The class was divided into two levels of readiness. I alternated between the two and the only problem I had, was in understanding how some of the students could be so uninterested in reading. My favorite pastime from an early age had always been finding a good book to read.

I began teaching in September 1957. The school I taught was Garner School, a one room rural school in Washabaugh County (now part of Jackson County), on the edge of the Badlands.

The first year I stayed with a local family. Their daughter was in the first grade and we walked the half mile to and from school together. On weekends I gathered pine cones and kindling for starting the heating stove, which burned coal. One of my students walked to school and hauled a bucket of water up a fairly steep hill. Each student brought his/her own drinking glass. If they took it home to be washed and forgot to bring it back, we folded a sheet of writing paper into a usable cup. Then, of course, there was the infamous "outhouse". With just a few students, we only had one. Each student had a "duty" to take care of daily, such as dusting erasers, raising and lowering the flag, sweeping the outhouse, helping the teacher sweep the schoolroom floor, and straightening books on the bookshelf. These duties gave the students a sense of pride in their school and they had no desire to deface it with graffiti. They were careful during the day about keeping it clean and if something was dropped, they picked it up.

The next two years I drove every day, so I brought the water for our use. We had graduated to a fuel oil heater, so there was no need for gathering kindling. I drove a Jeep pickup over roads that ran through pastures and there were two gates. The brakes had a way of going out unexpectedly and I had numerous close calls with the gates. A few times I was within inches of running through the gate before I managed to shift to a low gear and pull to a stop. I didn't relish the idea of having to fix fence after school!

When I attended grade school, my favorite teachers were the ones that kept us busy and insisted that we do our best. With that in mind, I did the same with my students. They were very well behaved and worked hard in their classes. I enjoyed recess with them. We played softball and games such as *steal sticks*, *fox and geese*, *ante over*, as well as practicing track events for the county track meet in the spring. Also in the spring, all the schools participated in the oral and written spelling contest.

School started at nine o'clock and dismissed at three thirty with a half hour noon. We followed the "Course of Study" and I appreciated the guidance it offered. If the textbooks we were using didn't cover a subject listed, we found other reference material at a library in the superintendent's office in the Wanblee School. At six week intervals we received tests covering materials listed in the "Course of Study". Twice a year the County Superintendent arrived for a visit or to administer semester tests to the students.

Once a month we had a Young Citizen League (YCL) meeting. The students learned to conduct a business meeting and take minutes. There was no need to have a treasurer. The main business was deciding which cleaning duties each student would carry out and how to celebrate holidays. They always opted for a party with sweet treats.

My teaching experience was a very rewarding one. It was so satisfying to see the progress my students made. I guess that is why the first grade was my favorite class to teach. They learned so much so quickly and it seemed like magic to me, the way they learned to read. I have to admit I almost wore out the reading flash cards, because I made sure they knew every word in their reading book before they went on to the next book in the series.

After three years of teaching, I was married and moved to a ranch in Bennett County. I substituted frequently at Pleasant Valley and Vetal Schools. I worked as an aide at Vetal School during the 1977-78 school year and worked with the third and fourth grade students. I originally was to work until the end of the first semester, but it was extended to last the entire year. Once again I had the sad experience of ending the school year in the spring. Each year I would think I'd be glad when the last day of school arrived, but that was never the case.

I had plenty to do on the ranch helping with the day to day ranch work, so that was the end of my teaching years, but I treasure the memories.