

Memories of Teaching

By Emilie Zacher

I have a brother who is 24 years older than me..I did not get the chance to know him well as a child but I did get the chance to know him through the magazines left in a tall cupboard in our farmhouse. He had his full collection of GRADE TEACHER magazines stored there. He had been a country school teacher before becoming a college professor. When I was old enough to discover that the world of reading would be a good world..I would invade that cupboard. This was in my pre-school days. I would pretend to read since I couldn't read. I would "row up" my sister and my baby niece and teach. I had no idea how to teach but when I went to first grade at the country school ..I thought I knew everything there was to know about teaching. My sis and the niece knew when I came home from school..it was time for their early childhood education. Folks told me I was strict.... I was only copying my serious first teacher. This continued for 2 years..we moved to the little town of Tolna,ND wherein I attended "town" school. My teaching turned into organizing a PLAYMATE club. PLAYMATE was a popular magazine which had a coupon for organizing a club. We received our membership cards and I must have elected myself president and decided each meeting would have a new lesson taught. I can remember lessons on embroidery, hiking..no one wanted to lead so I tried to teach lessons. When I was 11, Sunday school teachers were needed. I volunteered. They must have really

needed teachers as I became one. This continued for 6 years. I was making money babysitting in those days of age 11-17, too. I took books to my babysitting gigs and tried to teach there, too. Yes, I remember only wanting to teach! My parents died when I was 14 and my sister was 11. My older brother(Grade Teacher man) took my sister to Dickinson and I remained in Tolna with my younger brother(18 years older than me) and his family. Older brother believed I should go to Dickinson but I wanted to remain where I thought I had a better chance with scholarships, jobs, and teaching Sunday School. I missed my sister and my deceased parents. I kept busy.. I worked at the central telephone office and helped at the café', and did the babysitting. A small town meant it was easy for me to be the editor of our school paper, class officer, and cheerleading. When I look back, I realize I taught others in each of those activities, too. I was a "bossy-boss." When I was a junior, I was selected to go to Girls' State..I was a little frog in a big pond. I didn't teach there..I sat back in wonder at all I had to learn. Government positions were received in mock-elections. I believe I was elected dog-catcher???

I received college scholarships and will never forget my graduation as so many of the townspeople gifted me with money which I needed. I was now ready for Valley City Teacher's College. I applied for on-campus jobs and ended up working for 3 professors. I believe in the term "absent-minded" professors as I would be assigned to type the tests and I took classes from each of them and always knew what would be on their tests. I was not so lucky with my English

prof..she gave me a "D" on my short story which we had to write the first week of college. I took it back to the dorm and hid it under my mattress. I thought my story was good. In Dec. I began to worry about paying my 2nd semester tuition so I entered a SEVENTEEN short story contest with my "D" paper. I won \$100.00. I took the check to the English prof and told her the story..she said she had given a "D" to all of us..so we could see how we improved in her class. She taught me a lot about what not to do in teaching. Writing assignments were graded with care during my career.

My teaching career had to begin with interviews. In 1962, jobs were plentiful and each job interview promised me a job. I wanted Rapid City as our high school senior trip was there and I loved the area. Rapid City teacher-recruiters were in N.D. I took a bus from Valley City to Bismarck. I was interviewing with a Mr. Rau at the Social Security Office . I found a cheap hotel..so cheap they had no alarm clock in the room and no one at the desk to wake me up. I stayed up all night so I would not miss my interview..I was ready early so I could teeter in my 3 inch heels to the interview. I liked Mr. Rau instantly and he said he would call me when the superintendent made the decision. The next week The Call came with an offer of third grade teaching at Annie Tallent with a \$3,200 yearly salary. I was 19 years old and felt I had hit a jackpot.

My 25 third graders were wonderful! I can remember their names as I write this 49+ years later. I was a newly-wed living a few blocks from the school so I walked their neighborhood to school each day. I remember teaching my own

music and having my library in the classroom(no centralized library). We had to schedule our parent conferences and have them after school. This was done three times during the school year. Now there is student dismissal time with office-scheduled parent conferences. One thing has not changed: South Dakota offered the lowest salaries and this is done in 2011,too.

I quickly found the higher pay in other states as my husband was drafted into the Vietnam War. We had to leave paradise and move to Virginia. We were fortunate to be stationed in Williamsburg, Va.-a place alive with history and beauty. Our tiny cottage was next to a military couple. The wife taught at Walsingham Academy-a private Catholic school which was safe from the segregation wars. The wife told me that they needed a 4th grade teacher and I was hired right away. Again, teachers were needed all over the country! I had 40 students..some of these students were astronaut's kids as there was not a Cape Kennedy then and this area was their training ground. The school was very formal and students dressed in navy blue uniforms. I got in trouble with the head mistress when I had them sit on the floor for story-time...I will never forget her words "Walsingham students do not sit on the floor." My recess duty was much different from my Annie Tallent days..the students sat under the trees and read or prayed the rosary. When I would turn on the classroom lights, they would stand and the boys would bow and the girls would curtsy. I had only the sitting-on-the-floor problem while I was there. I enjoyed each student and the faculty. The students were sponges for each learning

experience. My walks to school took me through Colonial Williamsburg which was so stimulating..a little too stimulating one morn. I was walking by the magazine (building for shooting off the cannons) in the a.m. I was lost in thought and the cannons started firing..all of my corrected student papers and my books flew in the air..the soldier said, "that was just one of our citizens." Lots of laughter was aimed at me that a.m.

Our stay in Williamsburg was cut short and we had to move to Columbus, Ga.- home of Ft. Benning. My husband fixed helicopters for their battle in Vietnam. His salary was \$100.00 a month which meant-I better get a job! I did some substituting when we arrived..when the new school year began, I was offered a job. It proved to be the only job which I resigned due to unfair practices to children The school dismissed school for the day on the days a black American was seeking admission or air conditioning failure was reported as a reason for no school. Our school had no air conditioning?? I turned in my resignation and walked across the street to my church..lo and behold, they had a kindergarten opening. I had 40 cute kids learning in a church cry room. The private schools were the places to be as they were peacefully integrated. As soon as I began teaching, I felt nauseous. I was pregnant! I did not tell administration as I needed the job plus I loved the gig. I did take a job at a department store for evening/weekend work. Before our babe was born, I told the head mistress I would be having a baby within two weeks. She was most happy for us. My husband said he had a call that the staff was having a staff meeting which I thought

was strange as we never had a staff meeting. My husband dropped me off (I did not know how to drive) and when I walked into the church basement ..all of my students had their parents there and we had the most beautiful baby shower. I had been sewing baby clothes to save money. These parent and children remain special memories to me..13 of these kiddos lost their fathers that year to the Vietnam War. I will always remember taking roll and asking why Holly was missing that day..lil' Michael said, "the big black car with the yellow envelope was at her house yesterday." Yes, our Army Days were in the midst of Vietnam war and segregation wars. Both impacted education greatly.

1965 marked our return to Rapid City. I had taken a leave of absence and my new assignment was Knollwood where I remained for 10 wonderful years in 3rd grade. I took a short leave of absence in 1966 for the birth of our 2nd daughter. My student teacher took my place. District policy was: one could teach for only 3 months with a pregnancy. While on my first day of leave, Mr. Rau called and asked if I could teach 1st grade until a full time teacher was found. These kids had 3 teachers within 3 months. A teacher was found 6 weeks later so this emergency leave ended.

I returned to Knollwood third grade in 1967. One of the biggest wonders for me was an assignment I gave my students..they were to watch a TV program called UNTAMED WORLD. I had seen a contest from CBS connecting this program. Teachers were to send in projects used in the classroom in conjunction with this program. I pulled out every idea I could on BUGS!! We had cricket-jumping contest(our

school had an abundance of them), sang songs, wrote poetry, mashed up paper mache for our bug creations. I compiled all the activities and mailed them. On July 20, 1969- Armstrong was walking on the moon and I was glued to the TV. Our doorbell rang and I wondered who would not be watching TV?? It was a telegram from CBS saying our class had won. This was more than I could take in..man on the moon, my 1st telegram, and a win. The school received a movie projector, a Wollensak tape recorder..those were big deals in 1969. I won a trip to England from CBS and National Geographic. Trip to London and lodging was all paid for my family. By this time, I had 2 daughters-ages 3 and 5. We took the trip in the summer of 1970 with wonder, enjoyment, and lots of memories.

After 10 years at Knollwood, I served the district as a primary resource teacher, science resource teacher, and director of the Teacher Center. I had these positions for 10 years. Each day showed me what wonderful teachers there was in our area. I returned to the classroom in 1984 teaching 35 students in 6th grade at Meadowbrook. My years away from students saw many changes in family structures, students, and parent involvement. Kids were not carrying back packs when I left the classroom..videos did not exist! I could list many changes. 6th grade was a joy. After my 3rd year with 6th grade, I received an offer from Houghton Mifflin Educational Publishing which I could not refuse..it promised a bigger salary(I had become a single mom and both daughters were in college)..lots of travel(a new company car each year..yes, I had learned to drive in '75) and a MOVE! Move

was the only negative at that time to me. It proved to be good for me at that time as it was Sioux Falls. I missed Rapid City for 8 years but gained new friends while missing my daughters and old friends. After 8 years, the company moved me back to Rapid City. I remained with the company for 15 years. Again each day offered views of strong powerful educators. After retirement, I continued to work part-time for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for now-9 years. This means I have worked in education for 49 years. 25 years in school systems and 24 years as an educational consultant. That is why this essay is so long..it is hard to condense a half a century!

As I write this essay, I reflect on all these students and teachers who were so important in my life. In 1984, I was invited to sit in the viewing stand at Cape Kennedy for the launch of the shuttle 41-C(LDEF-long duration exposure facility). One of my former Williamsburg students was instrumental in that invite. Teaching did not make me rich but it did reap such rewards and many precious memories. I realize that I awakened each morning with eager anticipation for the day. How lucky was I to have positions and people that I enjoyed! I reflect on the students and the successes many have had. My first student, my sister, became an early childhood professor. It was not due to my naïve efforts at teaching her when she was very young..it may have been the desire she saw in me to become a teacher.