

## My Education Experience...Dorothy Piper...Winner

My name is Dorothy Piper. I was born and raised in the Norris, South Dakota, area. My parents are Herbert and Emma Waack. I am the eldest of four sisters.

I attended a small country school called Prairie View School for eight years. I entered high school in White River, South Dakota, where I graduated in 1951. I worked at Farmers State Bank in White River after school and during the summers of my junior and senior years. After graduation, I worked a year as a secretary in the Public Welfare office in White River. In April of 1952, I married my high school sweetheart, Ed Piper, and spent the next forty-two years living ten miles southwest of Wood, South Dakota. I always say that I covered Mellette County quite well.

For eighteen years following my marriage, I worked at being a wife, mother of four daughters and one son, gardener, cow-milker, chicken-raiser, shepherd, etc...etc... All of those things that a woman on a farm/ranch does year after year.

When our children had become school age, my husband and I spent many hours traveling the forty miles each day getting them to and from school. IN 1969, I worked a few hours at Sinklers Market in Wood during the week. This meant we only had to make one trip of twenty miles each day. I could go with the kids in the morning and stay all day. I was also the end of selling cream and eggs to buy groceries every week. I never did miss milking those cows.

In 1970, when my oldest daughter entered college and my youngest was in the first grade, the Wood school district was teaking applications for a teacher-aide position. I aplded for the job and was hired. It had been almost twenty years since I had been in the public work force so it was quite a challenge.

At that time, several schools in and near the reservation implemented a government program called the Engleman-Becker Distar Follow Through Program. The headquarters for the program wre located at the University of Oregon at Eugene. During my first year of employment this program was used in second grade at Wood. My job entailed assisting the classroom teacher with many different duties. The next year the program was incorporated in the Kindergarten through third grades. Three more aides were hired and I was responsible to teach math to the second and thir graders. We attended a two-week training program in Mission where consultants from the University of Oregon taught us the methods and concepts to use.

The certified teachers of each room had to be in charge of teaching the reading curriculum to the students. One aid had the math classes, and the other was in charge of the language arts curriculum. I was happy to get to teach the math as it had always been a favorite subject of mine. I had as many as six groups of math students each day and at least once a month a consultant from Oregon would come in to observe and many times video tape our teaching. This would show us what we were doing well and what we needed to improve upon.

Many patrons of the school district did not approve of the program because it was government implemented. However, many of them were in favor of it. I personally liked the program and felt it was geared to help a slower student but also held challenges for the faster learner. My youngest daughter, who is now 34 years old, says she learned more in the third grade in all three areas, (reading, math, and language), than at any other grade in her school years and is relying on many of the rules and concepts when helping her young children with their homework today.

One of the advantages of the program was that it encouraged the aides to further their education by taking college courses. I enrolled in the Supplementary Teacher Training Program through the University of South Dakota and was to start classes in the Fall of 1971. However, this was not to be, as that same evening (September 14<sup>th</sup>) my fourteen year old son received third-degree burns on both sides of his legs when a car that his dad and uncle were working on backfired and started the fire. He was in the Winner hospital for three weeks and was then flown to the Methodist Hospital in Omaha for six weeks where he had ten skin grafting operations. It was a very traumatic time for our family. The girls and I held things together at home and kept going to school while my husband spent the entire time with our son. We had something to be very thankful for that Thanksgiving as Lonnie came home on November 19<sup>th</sup>, very weak, but on the mend. Needless to say, I did not start my college courses until the Spring Semester of 1972.

The University of South Dakota sent instructors to Mission two or three evenings a week each semester and for summer sessions. They made sure that the specific courses for education degrees were offered for our enrollment. In addition, I received many credit hours from Black Hills State College, on course from Huron College, and my student teaching hours were acquired right in my classroom, accredited through the University of Oregon. One of the observers from the University of South Dakota visited my classroom many times. As a result of my hard work and determination, and thanks to my support husband and children, I graduated in four years (May of 1976) with a degree in Elementary Education—(25 years after my high school graduation). I graduated from the University of South Dakota without ever being on the campus except on the morning of the graduation ceremony. I was very proud to have become a certified teacher.

In the fall of 1976, there was not an opening for a teacher at the school so I continued to teach math for the Follow Through program once more. However, in September of 1977, I was hired as the certified classroom teacher of the second and third grades. That same year the Follow Through Program was discontinued in the Wood School. It was a real challenge to do all of the subjects following new curriculum requirements. The students and I both survived for a number of years, but as the enrollment of the school dropped, the high school was closed. The high school students were then forced to attend a local area high school. Some of these students went to White River, Winner, Lyman or Rodd County high schools. As the class sizes in the elementary portion of the school decreased, I then had to teach kindergarten through third grade the last few years until my retirement. The only problem I had with teaching so many grades was the time element.

It was very frustrating always feeling like I should have spent more time, but had to move on to something else in order to get everything done.

I did not have to endure the hardships of the old school houses that many of my retired teachers members did. I was fortunate to have a well equipped, clean, and carpeted room. I always felt my room was one of the nicest in the building and I got to teach in the same two adjoining rooms the entire twenty-five years that I was at the school. It was wonderful and fortunate that I had the opportunity to teach so many great children over the years. Most were very bright and intelligent. Some had a more difficult time with either home, health, or learning problems. It was my responsibility to help them. At my retirement party, my oldest daughter presented me with a basket of red apples with the names of all the students that I had taught in 25 years. At Christmas time I decorate my tree with them. They fill an entire big tree. What a very special gift filled with wonderful memories.

The most difficult time in my teaching career was when both my 54 year old husband (March 3, 1987) and a very special student, Karri Kauer (March 15, 1986) passed away from cancer. Their illnesses seemed to parallel each other making it very trying for me. The administration, staff, students, community members, and my precious family gave me so much love and support. That is what helped me to keep going and I will always be grateful.

A few years ago I was given this letter which was done by a former second and third grade student of mine. The teacher of the high school class felt that I should have it. It certainly made my day and made my many years of hard work worthwhile. It reads as follows:

A teacher that has greatly influenced my life is Dorothy Piper. She was my teacher in the second and third grades at Wood Elementary in Wood, South Dakota. To this day, she still teaches at Wood.

I learned my basic skills in math and English under her watchful eye. She made things easy to understand. When other teachers would give up on you if didn't know an answer, she would continually question you until you came up with the correct answer.

She was probably the strictest teacher I've ever had, but her rules were always fair. Her sense of humor in the classroom was unlike any I've seen before. Every once in a while, we would do something that would make her mad, but she would get over it quickly.

She didn't act as our superior or talk to us like we were babies. She would talk to her students on the same level. She treated us as adults. She respected our decisions.

There was never a student that didn't complain about the amount of work that she gave us. Yet, we learned far more than the other classes. I guess the extra work helped us in the long run. We always did well on our bests because of her extra homework.

She taught us more than just book learning. She taught us to make adult decisions. To act as no one's inferior, for we were equals with everyone. She didn't have a favorite student.

She was the best teacher I've ever had. She has greatly impacted my life, by giving me a clear-cut outlook on the world. She taught her students to give all we had and I thank her for that.

In January of 1994, I moved to my present home in Winner, South Dakota, and continued to teach at the Wood school until May of 1995 when I retired after 25 years. It was a career that I never expected to have. I feel that God was taking care of me so that I could take care of myself. How else could I have gotten a college degree in four years while working full time? It was such a rewarding career, and I know that I learned as much as the students did from our experiences. I will never forget how much I enjoyed the time spent with them all.