

## A LIFE TIME OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

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One cannot write about teaching and learning without going from the very earliest experience to the more ordered and highly organized and must include the unusual levels encountered along the way.

My very early experience began with entering first grade. Father loaded us into a horse drawn, two seat buggy. There were three old enough to begin school. In fact, we were a couple of years late because our father did not deem it important to get us to school. It took a visit from the law to move Dad to get us to school. Two sisters and I made that first beginning. Two others were too young and two were yet unborn. It was one of the small one-room schools with grades one through eight. A very pleasant young lady met and got us started. We were fortunate that the teacher had completed two years of teacher college. We had her for two years and she got us off to a good start. We practiced each letter until we could print them as they appeared on cards above the blackboard. I'll always believe that experiencing such an excellent beginning teacher helped me develop a life long love of learning

There was a succession of teachers who insisted on our doing the task right or repeating until it was right. Our second teacher made me print each letter from A to Z until it became almost automatic. She was an energetic redhead who took us from printed to the cursive and also taught us arithmetic and spelling. She also rescued me from the pond. Besides snow forts with the painful difference between snowballs and ice balls, we had a small waist deep pond that was an adventure when the ice started to soften. The surface was rubbery when you walked on it. Once too often, I tried it and went through. Teacher came to the rescue, pulled me from the pond, put me behind the large stove and had me remove my clothes. She dried the clothing while I wrapped up in her warm coat. We attended a succession of one room schools as we moved from farm to farm.

By seventh grade, we moved into the Argonne consolidated district. The large brick school building contained grades one through twelve. It was here that I encountered several great teachers, especially Ralph Sorheim and Carl Hofland. Mr. Sorheim taught math and was my first baseball coach who put me on the varsity when I was still in the eighth grade. Mr. Hofland became superintendent and baseball coach. We were destined to be a special class. With twenty-six members, we were the largest class to ever attend Argonne High. The school began as St. Mary's but was later renamed after the "Battle of the Argonne Forest" in World War I. Being part of the baseball team enhanced the learning experience. We went on to win thirty-nine games without a loss. There were other great teachers who made sure that we received good preparation for later college courses, especially reading, writing and English.

Following a 1937 graduation, I went on to Huron College. Working for local farmers during several summers, I had saved enough money for the initial tuition payment. Working at varied odd jobs, from restaurants to tending furnaces and washing windows, I managed to keep one step ahead of the college treasure. Things got a bit easier when I was hired by the 'Delivery Service' that picked up baskets of groceries from several stores and took them to homes in Huron. This became another learning experience; learning to drive the panel truck and learning the city routes. The driving was to later enable me to become a military driver.

Besides other courses, the educational theory classes would enhance later teaching and learning requirements. Huron College was a very solid, well staffed institution. Skill and culture were definite strengths. Always looking for ways to earn a little money, I joined 'Company C' of the 109<sup>th</sup> Engineer Regiment in 1939. We had drills and two week summer encampments. In 1940, the guard was federalized and in February of 1941 sent to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. It was there that I decided to try for a truck driver position. I was successful and became a 'squad' truck driver. Ten soldiers rode in the covered truck. The platoon sergeant rode with me. This was much better than being a marching digging soldier. Following the December 7<sup>th</sup> 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Guard Regiment began intense drilling. The 109<sup>th</sup> was part of the 34<sup>th</sup> "Red Bull" Division. We pulled out for Trenton, New Jersey and Irland. Several of us, not liking the move, decided to join the U.S.

Air Corps. This brought a whole new learning experience, training to be flyers. There was a thirty day period of “ground school”, the Theory of Flight, weather and the rules and regulations pertaining to flying. Now came the new and wonderful experience, flying. I joined five other cadets at a small private flight school at Jackson, Mississippi. Our instructor was Bill Davis. Flying did not begin easily. I washed the front cockpit floor three times. It looked as though I would be ‘washed out’. A friend gave me his charcoal pills. The double dose was effective and I had overcome motion sickness. The actual flying was easy and enjoyable. I believe it was my destiny. After about eight hours with the instructor, it was time to ‘solo’! Mr. Davis stepped out of his seat and I took off alone in the Stearman. What a feeling! One I’ll never forget. It was a new learning experience. We would fly three airplanes. For primary, we had a biplane, the Stearman; next a monoplane, the Vultee BT13A and finally the Advanced AT6. After graduation, we became second lieutenants and got some transition flying in combat aircraft. At each level, we were taught all the aerial combat maneuvers including the famous Immelmann named for a WWI German ace. The maneuver starts with a roll over that puts you behind the enemy. Basic training took place at Blytheville, Arkansas. The more powerful, 150 horse power engine required learning how to control it. This phase included night flying and cross country. There were several short cross country trips with the instructor and then solo trips. One of these was a night flight, Blytheville to Memphis, and Jackville to Corinth and back to Blytheville. On the night cross country, we were expected to stay oriented by trusting our instruments. I had no problem but four pilots became disoriented and flew their planes into the ground. After finishing basic training at Craig Field, Selma, Alabama. The advanced phase of training had the North American AT6A. it was a joy to fly! It had a 650 h.p. engine, was sleek and easy to maneuver. The flying included acrobatics, cross country navigation and night flying and instruments. Instrument meant just that, relying on the instruments by flying under a hood and night flying. I received my wings and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. bars in February of 1943.

I was then assigned to an auxiliary field at Eglin Air Force base in Florida. There was an extensive period of aerial and ground gunner training plus advanced acrobatics. In May, came my first towing assignment. Towing was to be a primary duty. We first rode with a trainer who stressed the need for safety procedures. Keeping exact altitude was very important. We had only one fatal accident. A student pilot hit the iron ball which caused his plane to fall into the gulf waters. Towing was interspersed with teaching ground and aerial gunnery. During this period, I advanced from operations officer to squadron commander. I had the opportunity to get a few hours flying transition in the Republic P47 and the Douglas RA33. These were the only combat type planes available at the time.

The duties at Eglin continued until July 31, 1945. Now came the return to South Dakota to continue education leading to the B A degree. One semester was needed at Huron College for graduation and a teaching certificate. I was then hired by the superintendent of the Sisseton school district. My duties began as a class room teacher and head track coach. I was also an assistant coach in football and basketball. I would be teaching mainly seniors but would have some sophomores in World History. A good instructor at Huron had taught me to have a visual presentation of the next day’s assignment so that upon entering the classroom, the students would be occupied at once. It was an opportunity to interact with the students as they copied their assignment from the black board. As more sophisticated ways of presenting material became available, there was more time for teaching.

This was a wholly new experience. There were two populations to react with. There was the administration and teaching staff and the students and parents. The staff was a great group and it was to be acquainted and to begin new friendships. The senior class was an unusually friendly and inquisitive group. We had a good beginning. They, knowing of my recent activities, wanted to discuss some of them with me. The first years at Sisseton were very busy and I learned much. In 1954, our track and field team won the Northeast Conference championship, a first for the school.

Veterans had been reminded that they must use their GI benefits or lose them. I began attending summer school at the University of Colorado at Boulder. After three summers there, I transferred to South Dakota State

College to work toward a Masters Degree in Education. This was completed in 1954 and I became eligible to become a principal.

I must go back to the work with students. In November 1954 with a few horns and signs, we marched along Main Street urging people to get out and vote. We also got permission for students to pin "I have voted" stickers on voters. I was surprised to go to the superintendent's office and find the Republican county chairman complaining about our working for the Democrats. The superintendent assured him that we meant for ALL voters to vote. We also, at this time, began "Student Government Day". Using their class time, students went to all the city and county offices to observe and work with city and county officials. It was especially fun to be sheriff or policemen and get to ride in the official cars. All this activity culminated in "Student Government Day" becoming an annual event that the schools in Roberts County are still observing.

Our next big venture was taking a group of students to Washington D.C.. In 1954, one could still catch the Milwaukee train at Summit, South Dakota. Because of the expense, our first two groups were very small. Most of the young people had never been outside of the county. They, for the first time, had meals in the diner where they were served by the very formal porters and waiters. The kids wore their best and had a great experience. As students began to save money for the tour, the groups got larger. We began also to include both seniors and juniors. At least two of the groups required two tour buses in D.C.

By early in the 1960's, members of the school board and administration were beginning to talk about building a new high school. Because the district was about one third Native American, the board approached the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Congressman Dr. Ben Reifel helped get the necessary legislation passed. The building became a reality and we were able to move into the large new plant in 1971. With an emphasis on vocational education, there were shops for agriculture, auto mechanics, metal shop, carpentry and drafting, electrical, home economics and health occupations. We were fortunate to employ several vocational teachers the same year we moved to the new building. We then found there not enough students interested in vocational courses. We decided the answer was to get other small schools interested. So began the multi-district vocational classes. There were two hour blocks and time for all the vocational subjects. Those multi-districts are still operating. I had the feeling that this was one of our proudest accomplishments. The South Dakota legislature provides funding for vocational education.

I believe we have fully traced my learning-teaching experience.