

SOUTH DAKOTA RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

SDRT NOMINATION FORM

REMINISCENT TEACHER AWARD

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PERSONAL HISTORY

Glenny M. Tays

To become a sociologist and “save the world” was my goal upon graduation from Presho High School in 1951. Briar Cliff College, Sioux City, Iowa, had offered me a four-year academic scholarship; so I chose to attend there. Prior to leaving for college, I needed to have some minor sinus surgery in Sioux Falls, which I did a week before the fall semester began. After two weeks of classes and auditioning for the Gregorian Choir and making it, I was settled in and was asked to help register guests at an Open House on campus on Sunday. I did not show up and was found in the dorm room barely breathing. A doctor was attending the Open House and took me to St. Joseph’s Hospital for care. The result of my surgery had caused drainage into my lungs, which resulted in pneumonia. My parents were called immediately. At 3 a.m. I was given the last rights as my condition had deteriorated.

My parents arrived at 5 a.m. in the morning and were with me day and night for three days. When I was released on the 4th day, my father told me I would be bed ridden for three months and would need to pack up and go home. After two months my father told me I needed to get back into school. I told him I did not think any college would take me this late. He called the president of the National School of Business in Rapid City, South Dakota; and they would accept my registration if I made up nearly three months of work. I did that and graduated from the school in August of 1952. The president of the college asked me to stay on in the administration offices, which I did. The fall semester had just begun, and one of our instructors became very ill. The president asked me to take over her duties in the classroom for two weeks until a replacement could be found. At the end of three weeks, the president asked if he could visit my classroom during class to observe me. He met with me after the observation and told me I was a born teacher and would

be grateful if I would finish out the year. I was only nineteen years old then, but now knew that I really wanted to become a teacher.

Dakota Wesleyan University offered me an academic scholarship and a job as secretary in the Admissions Office. I earned my BA from there in 1956 with majors in Language Arts and Business Education and minors in Education and Social Science. The Matthew D. Smith Award in Education was awarded to me at the graduation ceremony. My Masters. Degree was earned at the University of Montana, Missoula, in 1961 with a major in Secondary Administration (high school principal) and cognate work in psychology, library science, reading, linguistics, and sociological foundations of education. I had been admitted into the graduate school at Iowa State University in 1976 and had completed one-third of my doctorate in Sociology before returning to South Dakota to assist with ill parents in 1978.

Other than my first teaching job at nineteen, my first job following graduation from DWU was at Kimball. The first day we were on duty, we were given our class lists by the superintendent and told to “teach them.” We did not have another meeting during the year as we were busy teaching. Throughout my years of teaching, “called meetings by the administration” became more frequent, thus more interruptions. During my early years of teaching, I felt so much like a professional. As the years passed, I felt less as a professional; however, my focus on the success of my students was always there. The individual needs of my students prompted me to create—effective delivery, techniques, philosophy, success standards, and human relations.

The number of administrative/ancillary positions in public school education has increased by so many over the years. When I began teaching in high school in 1957, we had a superintendent and one or more janitors—no assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals, curriculum directors, school nurses, buildings and grounds superintendents, teacher aids, etc., which impacted our budgets. Placing computers in the schools has increased staffing and budget needs. I can remember when my first Apple computer was delivered to my classroom in a box. I set it up by reading the directions and began learning how to use it with no formal education. The same applied for the printer. I learned very quickly that the dipswitch on the printer had to be checked frequently as the students would change the settings—OUT OF ORDER AGAIN. Students can be so clever at times. Because I was required to set up the new equipment, I understood so much more about the computer. Today, a computer literate person does that type of work in most schools.

We did not have in-service secessions for many years into my career. Through professional publications and through my focus in the areas my students were having trouble mastering prompted me to find solutions and successful ways to GET THE JOB DONE—TEACHING STUDENTS. In 1995, the year I left the

Rosebud Indian Reservation, the students had a visit with me the last day of school. They let me know they had worried their junior year that when they became seniors they would not be able to pass my class and that the juniors in 1995 felt the same way as they did. I asked them why they did not tell the juniors that the content was not difficult, as they had discovered. They laughed and told me those students could go through what they did. I told them I was not different than their other teachers. One young lady, raised her hand and said, "Yes, you are different than other teachers because YOU MADE US LEARN." There was no response to that, as I was surprised. Wasn't that the job I was hired to do?

In reflecting on attendance over the years, my observation is in some families regular class attendance does not seem what it used to be. I do not know if Truant Officers are used in today's school districts or not. If a child is not in attendance on a regular basis, the school cannot be held responsible for the student's lack of success. When I was on the reservation, there was an attendance problem. To alleviate the situation somewhat, I created an in-class graded evaluation every day. A couple of the teachers came to see me one day to tease me about not having any students in my classroom that day because the word around the school was the Senior Class was taking a "Skip Day." Not one of the seniors was absent all day long; however, some of the other teachers who taught seniors had absences.

Classroom management is critical to learning in the classroom. This was not a troublesome part of teaching as I set my parameters and discussed the reasons for them with the students. At one school in particular, tardiness to class became a problem for all teachers. The students were informed by me that they would be fined so many minutes for a minute or any part of a minute tardy. All seniors voted on the issue and voted the "fine" to be fifteen minutes. One young man had three hours to make up at the end of a year, which he did by helping me take inventory. The time he was tardy amounted to 12 minutes for the year.

A situation arose which caused me to set the standard that no credit could be earned for any assignments or tests unless passing grades were earned on each assignment and test. Students had to keep doing the work over again (not in the same form) until they achieved a passing grade. This resulted in no failing students. The reason I had set this standard was that many of the students told me they had never done a term paper, which was one of the junior-year requirements. They told me they had averaged their grades and found out they could still pass the course without doing a term paper and just getting a zero on the assignment. My response was I could not accept that as they had to prove to me on each assignment or test they did not know anything to earn a zero. I also allowed students who were good students to redo any assignments on which they had not earned a satisfactory grade, according to their personal standards. This created much extra work for me, but it did work and was fair to all. One parent requested a conference with me because her daughter's grade was not high enough. After looking for her grade in the grade book, I found she had earned a 97 percent in Senior English. Her mother stated that her daughter was earning 104 percent in mathematics. I asked the young lady if she had told her

mother about her opportunity to improve her grade if she wished; however, she would not be able to earn a 104 percent in Senior English as 100 percent was the cap. She had not informed her mother of that opportunity, so she explained it to her. The mother got up and walked out of the room. The young lady was so embarrassed and looked so forlorn. She followed her mother out the door, but waved at me when she left. We did communicate in our own way.

Students were often writing their names or carving their initials into desks in my early years of teaching. To try to alleviate the defacing of school property, I had a visit with the students the first week of school. One morning during the second week of school, I was scrubbing the desks in my classroom when two students walked in. They told me I should not be doing that. They pitched in, I thanked them, and then I told each of my classes about the volunteer help and respect for school property. After that, I walked the aisles and checked each desk after the bell rang. This really helped. Once computers were placed in our classroom, I used to damp mop the floor once a week. Some students walked in on me one morning and offered to mop. The floors were only mopped every now and then by the janitorial staff, but dust was a problem with the computers. I have always found there are some students who are so willing to pitch in and help. When new computer desks were donated to the classroom, I was putting them together before and after school. Before I completed that task, I had so much help from both boys and girls. One of the students brought in an electric screwdriver, which I did not know existed. Again, I learned from my students.

Having computers was such a wonderful addition to the teaching of English. One spring I was given permission to pilot an original research project using primary data gathered by the students using their own sample. I attended a workshop in Rapid City on use of the Print Shop, wrote out note cards, and posted them above the computers as cues when the students began profiling their data. One young man, who was very aggressive and surly at times, asked me if I needed help after school with the project as students were coming in before and after school and during my plan period to use the computers. This young man told me he had to work at the grocery store every day at 5p.m., but could work until just before 5 p.m. every day. He was so good with computers. The students were in shock. I had so many nice comments from the students he had helped. He mended so many fences by working with his classmates. His mother was a teacher in another school, found out what he was doing, and called to visit with me. She said she could not believe the change in her son and thanked me for believing in him by giving him a chance to help his classmates and his teacher.

Experiencing positives in my teaching career have been overwhelming. No day is ever the same. Teaching content at the elementary, high school, and college level is not difficult, other than keeping up-to-date with information, current practices, policies, inventions, and social changes. The real challenge to me was learning to deal with the different types of personalities and learning needs of each individual. To witness the success of our students in the classroom and in the world of work is

so gratifying. The young person who struggled throughout a period of time in his/her growing years but became self-assured and found his/her niche in life is “beauty.” Having the honor to teach future college professors, a legislator, college president, medical doctors, and future teachers who have acknowledged what they had learned before college is as positive as teaching can be. The number of teachers impacting the lives of students daily is the strength of our nuclear families and the strength of our local, state, and national leadership.

The length of time I have been teaching has been very positive; however, I have experienced some negatives. When students lie about their teacher to the parents, such hard feelings overwhelm a situation. My supervisor called me to his office during my plan period one day to visit with a student and her parents. The student had told her parents I was prejudiced against her and did not provide her with as much time on the computers as some students. I asked to be excused for a minute to go to my classroom to get a chart. I returned to the office and showed the chart to the parents and my supervisor. I charted the time allotted for computer use for each of my students by class period. If they were absent from school, computer time could be made up before or after school or during my plan period. Her record showed she had been absent twice in one week and had not made up any time. Her parents did not know she had been absent and asked her if she had lied about Mrs. Tays. She nodded her head “yes,” and I was excused from the conference.

Another instance was when students came running into my classroom, which was in session, to tell me to get into the girls’ restroom as a girl was trying to light the ceiling with a cigarette lighter. I went to the door of the restroom and could see the girls standing on a toilet seat and trying to light the ceiling. I asked one student to get an administrator, another to get a woman counselor, and another student to ask another teacher to witness what was going on. I encouraged the girl to drop the lighter onto the floor, which she did. I stayed in the doorway until the girl had been escorted by the counselor and administrator to the office. That night a little after 9:30 p.m., the mother of the girl phoned me and told me I had manhandled her daughter; and she was going to press charges. I told her I had not even entered the restroom and had witnesses to prove that. I told her to do what she had to do, and I would do what I had to do. Nothing came of her threat to me, but the girl had stiff consequences.

Sometimes, our co-workers can create a negative climate. One day after school, one of the teachers came up to me and said, “I don’t like what you are doing with the seniors. You are here some nights until about 6 o’clock. If students want to fail, it is their business.” Without thinking, my response was “I am not in the failure business.” I thought about what had occurred with the teacher and became a little uneasy. The next morning, I stopped in to see my supervisor, related the incident, and asked him if I was a problem for the staff. He leaned back on his chair, started laughing and said, “Mrs. Tays, you set such a high standard, and none of the other teachers want to do that. Go back upstairs and keep doing what you are doing.”

I never used the Coffee Room, which did not sit well with staff. I will admit that I used avoidance behavior to stay away from negativism.

Over my forty some years of teaching, I have found that the public is not aware that teachers are only paid for the days taught. Many people think that teachers are paid for all holidays, special days of observance, and twelve months a year even though the school year is 175 days plus in-service days. Few people understand the time a teacher puts in daily to get the job done—TEACHING STUDENTS TO LEARN AND APPLY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS.

My highest salary earned as a teacher was \$31,900. Would I do that over again? YES. What I learned as an educator working with students at all levels has enriched my life so much. I have so many stories I could relate, but doing that would be a book. One incident with an entire class that I would like to share is attached to this short history.