

MY GOAL: TO TEACH

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It was September, 1934. I would be in the seventh grade at Hegg School, Jackson # 2, Sanborn County and our new teacher would be Mrs. Laura Swanson.

Being the oldest of seven at the time, I had many family responsibilities and I loved school. Mrs. Swanson made all twenty-three students, grades one through eight, feel special. She knew for me to go to high school would be extremely difficult but she made me believe that I could just do it – and one day be a teacher!

It is September, 1936. There are no school buses. To go to high school I would have to stay in town or commute. A federal program had made a girls dormitory in the school gymnasium, a boys dormitory on the second floor of a downtown building and a kitchen/dining room in a large basement room in the school. Obviously there was a fee for four nights and sixteen meals. There was no money for high school in my parents' pockets. This was the time of the Notorious Depression of the '30's.

Even though my head knew there was no way my parents could afford to send me, my heart desperately wanted to go. School had begun. I begged. I cried. I promised. The greatest gift my mother gave me was the day she took me to see Superintendent Crosswait and said, "We have a girl who wants to go to school but we cannot pay to send her". He arranged for me to work in the kitchen before breakfast and for the Crosswait family after school.

Each year I had different working arrangements; sophomore, in a nursing home; junior, for an English teacher in school; senior, in the county superintendent's office after school and in the home for board and room. My goal – to be a teacher like Mrs. Swanson!

Graduating and wanting to go to college to earn teaching credentials, I needed time. Now I am the oldest of ten children and while in school I did earn money in the summer months – shocking grain, helping to cook for threshing crews, housekeeping for a weary mother – but that money, \$2.00 a week, was for the family.

Having graduated in 1940 with two years of typing and shorthand, in the spring of 1941 I went to work in the courthouse. While there, I applied for and was hired to work at Ag.Ec., South Dakota State, Brookings. I started in the secretarial pool, became the secretary for Professors Nelson and Cotton, and eventually was the officer manager, earning \$90.00 a month.

Believing in prayers, I contacted Sioux Falls College the summer of 1943 applying for a work contract. I was accepted!!! 1943 – 1944 I was doing the

bookkeeping for the meat ration stamps at John Morrell, working on campus, and beginning my teaching preparation courses during summer school as well as the full year term.

In 1944-45, I wore many different hats. I was the secretary for Mr. Van Ausdal, of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the assistant dean of women, plus working in the kitchen. Being so very broke for so very long and having earned an associate's degree, my roommate and I applied to teach at Dell Rapids. I signed the contract to teach the self-contained seventh grade class for. . . \$900.00 for ten months or \$90.00 a month!!! How ironic as that is what I was earning as a secretary before college plus my annual salary was \$1080.00

I was one happy camper! The students were so cooperative. The parents were so supportive. Along with the academics we had roller skating parties, hikes, and picnics.

My second year there I met the young man who became my husband. Incidentally, that year the Rev. Dick Ward, a former pastor at the First United Methodist Church here in Rapid City, was one of my students. Amazingly the Board would not honor my contract if I married. Yes, I broke the contract.

We lived in Flandreau. Harold Engberg, who was an elementary principal in Rapid City in the '60's, hired me in 1949 to teach the English/Social Studies block for grade seven here in town. I loved teaching, was married, and had our first son.

Eventually we decided I should be a stay at home mom as we decided to add to our family. On February 2, 1953, our second son was born. Now we were a family of four.

On February 8th, a friend insisted I see a doctor about my grossly swollen right ankle. I did. He diagnosed thrombosis phlebitis. Treatment began with wet, hot packs at home. Weeks later, I was hospitalized. It became my Lost Spring as I began the odyssey February 8th and was released from the hospital May 23rd.

An abundance of medical bills made it easy for me to say yes when Superintendent Engberg called. I returned to teach the English/Social Studies block. However, the Math teacher was making a move and he suggested I take the seventh and eighth grade math classes. 'Twas a good move until . .

The spring of 1959. School was out. At that time there were no special education programs. Mentally one of my students was unable to do the course work. However, a young man, the son of an educator, was very capable. He knew he had made virtually no attempt to learn the subject. His parents knew he had failed. I was called to the Superintendent's office and told to fail the young lady (a social promotion) and pass the young man. Morally, I chose not to do that so my choice was to be fired for insubordination and lose my teaching certificate or resign. Of course, I resigned. I was

furiously angry!! I felt betrayed by the school board as they supported the superintendent.

Hindsight proves it was Heaven sent! I borrowed a thousand dollars which covered my tuition and books for two eight-week sessions and the traditional hours for the 1959-1060 year at Sioux Falls College.

Even though I had taught eleven years, I needed cadet teaching hours so I was assigned to Miss Coffee at the Axtel Park Junior High in Sioux Falls. Having completed the cadet teaching, Principal Stoltz asked me to rescue three out-of-control seventh grade math classes; all in the forenoon. I had the afternoons for several college courses I would have to fulfill by doing whatever the professor required. The teaching was heaven sent as it provided commuting collateral!

Mr. Stoltz asked me to apply to teach in Sioux Falls Public Schools. He wrote an excellent reference letter. However, Mr. Tressler, the personnel director, could not hire me as the Board policy was no more than two children – we had four!

In retrospect, that too was Heaven sent as in the spring of 1960 I was writing a Test and Measurements final in the Dean's office when Superintendent Paul Stevens from Rapid City came by recruiting teachers. As they walked to his office, the Dean said "There's a lady you should have on your staff." Several weeks later I had a contract to teach in Rapid City!

I was assigned to teach math/science block to the eighth grade, general business to the ninth grade and an eighth grade homeroom at West Junior High. Being the "new kid on the block" and an over abundance of students, I was a traveling teacher with classes in an annex, as well as on the first and second floor of the main building. It is possible to teach math as a traveling teacher; science was a lost cause. If it hadn't been for the compassion, the support of Bert Rau, the principal I'd have been a jibbering idiot!

Shortly, the block concept lost favor and I taught only math. I was at West Junior High from 1960-1967. It was an eventful time as a building addition was added and I was assigned a room which was at the intersection of two hallways. The principal requested I report to him any teachers not doing hall duty. I refused! On a daily bulletin there was a notice "There will be a short teachers meeting at 4 pm". Glibly, I said to the office secretary "I won't have to go because I'm tall". Overhearing me the principal called me into his office and at length made it clear I'd be there. He did not understand my warped sense of humor. Come time to donate to the United Way, the principal insisted we show him the amount of our donation. Another teacher and I refused so we were sent to Superintendent Stevens. Wisely, he transferred us – I to South Junior, she to Stevens.

I taught seventh and eighth grade math in room 205 from 1967 until I retired in 1984. There were several of us in the Rapid City Education Association who were acutely aware that the school board had adequate funds to grant the teachers' salary

increase. Every effort was made to negotiate an increase. Failing that, the teachers voted to strike - and did so! We met every day in the former Coliseum. I was the RCEA secretary. The Board had gone to court so at 10:30 pm the deputy sheriff knocked on our door and handed me a subpoena to report to court the next day. What did we win? Ed Ranney, a legislator from Rapid City, filed the most stringent public employee antistrike law of any state in the nation. It passed!!

It was a tumultuous time. The RCEA along with other associations across the state met on the steps of the capitol building during the time the legislature was in session – PR strategy. We spent time lobbying the legislators and the Governor. Give us a high five for trying!

Incidentally, I received a leader certificate and furry, white buffalo from Governor Farrar. Our children claim this as a toy for Mom!

Also during this time I worked with the RCEA negotiators. One year I negotiated for the association and Tom Simmons was paid by the Board to represent them. Sorry, but I do not admire that man. He was rude, arrogant, and despicable! I was pleased by the teacher support. To this day I do not understand why members of the Board do not understand that the teacher is the most valuable component in the education of each and every child.

I was blessed to be able to attend an eight week summer science session at USD; a geology summer session at the School of Mines, a math summer session at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb. Add to that, opportunities to attend state and national math conferences. It must be recognized that the Board did not pay the expenses; on their own, teachers recognize the need to “keep up” and, so to speak “bear the burden”.

South Dakota did not have a state math organization. Teachers from Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Mitchell, Douglas and Winner organized the SDCTM. We were affiliated with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Dr. Cook from USD was a fervent supporter.

Being active in the local and state organizations we saw changes such as the restrictions on married women teachers, the \$200.00 stipend for male head-of-the-household, sick leave, personal leave, leave banks . . . to name but a few over the years. I cannot fathom a teacher not belonging to the local and the state educational associations.

Serving one term on the Professional Practices Commission we had occasion to hear the complaints of a teacher being verbally abusive with her second grade students. I will never understand why the principal did not use his authority to protect the children. Yes, we recommended she lose her teaching certificate.

In the early '60's I belonged to Delta Kappa Gamma. A very worthwhile project was Florence Krieger, Verna Deimer and I compiling information of teacher retirement programs in the other states making it available to state legislators as well as any

interested parties. I wish I'd have kept a copy of that labor of love. And aren't we enjoying the fruits of our labor now! Florence Krieger definitely was a lynchpin in the groundwork of the retirement system.

Let me share only a few memories of former students. A young man had been told by his parents not to go near one of their horses. He did. The horse kicked him in the head, killing him. Having a special boy in the last seat of the first row on Friday and clearing out the desk Monday morning was very difficult.

I was assigned a student who was in trouble with the law. He was given this second chance but he absolutely must be obedient. During class I call on him, he stands and calls me a SOB. Truly it broke my heart when I took him to the principal's office because I knew he'd be going to Plankinton. The sheriff came and took him away.

A young lady in my seventh grade class was chewing snuff. I refused to have her in class sending her to the office. The next morning I was called to the principal's office to meet the parents. They said they bought the snuff; she had their permission to chew it. Thankfully, the principal agreed with me and told the parents she would not have it in school.

I did not always have the principal's support! I had a young man in my sixth period math class who chose not to do his assignment because he would be leaving class for a cross country meet. I chose to have him stay and do the assignment then I would take him to the meet. I was reminded by the coach and the principal I created a major problem. Incidentally, his mother supported me and thereafter, he always had his assignment.

This district owes mega-appreciation to Ernie Van Gerpin for establishing the credit union. For years he and Dick Meade each had a desk, two spare chairs, and a file cabinet in a closet on the second floor of the present Dakota Middle School building. I was on the Board when we spread our wings buying a vacated building on the corner of Quincy and Fifth St. Today, again the Highmark Federal Credit Union is expanding.

Finally, we all had students that became stand-outs. Teaching in Flandreau, I had Terry Phares as a student. He came to South Junior to teach Social Studies. Subsequently, he was named the assistant principal. Would you agree when a former student becomes your principal it's time to retire? I do. And I did. In 1984, I retired with fond memories of thirty-four and a half years teaching in grades seven, eight, and nine. (The half because I was married, remember?)