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## MEMORIES OF A SCHOOL SECRETARY

I had always said I would never be a teacher. Being very bashful as I was growing up, I was scared to even recite in class for fear of making a mistake of being ridiculed. I had no idea what I wanted to do after high school, so I enrolled at the School of Mines and took a general course for a couple of years. My parents both worked, and I helped my grandmother with the cooking. The thought came to me that I might like to be a dietician, and an aunt knew of “just the right school”. So off I went to Wisconsin and enrolled as a junior at Stout Institute, but I lacked credits for cooking, sewing and other freshman subjects. Before I had been there very long, I learned that in order to graduate I had to take practice teaching! I finished that year and that was the end of that. Back home I took several more courses at the Mines, and being a good typist, I did papers, reports and theses for Mines’ students (correcting the spelling and punctuation!). A friend was leaving her job as supply clerk at Rapid City High School (now Dakota Middle School) so I applied and was hired. Mr. Bergquist was superintendent, and my office adjoined his on first floor. Each week I received requisitions from the teachers in the elementary buildings, and I packed boxes with the supplies they needed; everything from “zipper” straws to “duck” tape. I cut stencils and ran them off on the ditto and mimeograph machines. The worst part of that was cleaning those stencils so they could be used again. There were some work-study student who usually got that job! Many times I remember climbing three flights of stairs with an armload of books when I couldn’t find a custodian. My office was also the place where the mechanical drawing students came for their paper, pens and ink.

In 1946 I was married and went to work for Mr. Haskins in the Principal’s office at the same school. This involved keeping attendance, correspondence and a lot of typing. We started our family in 1947, and I became a stay-at-home mom.

In 1968 my husband resigned as City Recreation Director. My youngest son was in junior high and I decided I’d better go back to work. The secretary at what used to be Annie Tallent elementary School was leaving, so I applied and was hired in February of 1969. There were 500 students, and my hours were from 9:00 to 3:00, just perfect because I was home when the boys got out of school. That soon changed. As I look back on the 19 years I worked at

Annie Tallent, there was never a dull moment, and one needed to be a jack-of-all-trades. The nurse was only there a couple of times a week, so I had to take care of scrapes and bruises, broken bones and upset stomachs. I still remember the little boy in a pretty plaid shirt who was my first “patient.” He had a nosebleed. There was a cot in the nurse’s room where they could lie down until we could reach a parent, which was sometimes pretty difficult. One boy had seizures periodically, generally on the playground. I would grab a blanket, run outside and hold his head to keep him from grinding his face in the dirt, then get some help to carry him back in the building. Many times I had to use the mop when the custodian wasn’t available. At Christmas time the children wore little white capes when they sang in the program. There were always a few mothers who just couldn’t figure out how to make a cape or didn’t have a sewing machine, so the lunch clerk and I managed to come up with extra capes. We had an iron just to be sure there were no wrinkled capes in the program. For many years my Principal excused me from the office so that I could practice with the children and play the piano for them for the program. We had to push the piano from one room to another when we practiced.

There was always typing to be done, phones to answer, attendance reports to figure out and messages to give and receive, and as I said in the beginning, I never wanted to be a teacher but would do everything I could to help them out.

One afternoon the Principal was at a meeting. The children came running in from the playground carrying a couple of suitcases. A woman had just come from California, determined to take her children and for some reason had left her luggage on the playground. In the meantime, a first grader had gotten out of hand and was sent to the office. I had him on my lap, trying to calm him down, so the lunch clerk took the woman into the Principal’s office and tried to get her settled down. We knew if we let the children go with her, we’d be in trouble. You needed to know how to handle everything!

Each Spring I had to order supplies and books for the next school year. Having grown up during the depression of the 30’s, I tried to be as conservative as possible. Sometimes the teachers were a little disturbed because they didn’t get everything they wanted. For example, we had run out of 9 x 12 yellow construction paper but had plenty of 12 x 18. One teacher asked why I hadn’t ordered the smaller paper, and I said as long as we had an abundance of the bigger paper, to cut it in half. Coming back to the school in mid-summer, unpacking 100 or more boxes of supplies and no air conditioning, was probably the hardest part of this job.

All in all, those 19 years at Annie Tallent were some of the best years of my life. I’ll never forget the little Native American boy, a second grader, who, when he learned that I was retiring, brought me something every day – a page he had colored or something he had

written, even a flower of two. I still have a teddy bear with a Santa hat which he gave me and goes on my Christmas tree each year. They were all “my kids”. It’s such a joy to see one of them now, grown up with kids of their own and discover they still remember me. I’m so glad I didn’t decide to become a dietician!

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