

Some of My Teaching Years...

By Rose Marie (Ahlers) Rush

First came the yellow pencil sharpened with Dad's pocket knife, then the fountain pen, the ballpoint pen, along came the calculator and then the computer and the list keeps growing. What progress we have made through the years and through the success in education, be it in the one room country school or the larger city classroom.

I was born in a country home, grew up in southern Tripp County and went to a country school for eight years, the same school that my dad and his siblings had gone their eight years. My mother, also a country gal, went to a country school and taught in county schools five years before getting married.

During the years growing up I always liked to play school with my younger brother, sisters, cousins and neighbor friends. I always thought it was fun.

I attended Winner High School and went on to Southern State Teachers College at Springfield, SD, where I got a one year degree, thus starting my teaching career. This is where mom got her one year degree.

My first year of teaching experience was in a country school in southern Tripp County, the last school before Nebraska. Beaver Creek School, my first teaching experience will always hold a special spot in my heart. The school had its own local school board as did each country school. During that time there were many rural schools in Tripp County.

I remember the day I went to get my contract signed by that school board, I hit some ruts in the dirt road and up-set my dad's Chevy. I was so scared I grabbed the contract and crawled out of the car window and started up the road (crying I'm sure) when a neighbor/parent of the school came to my rescue. He took me to their home and called my parents. The car was little worse for wear, and we all went back home in the car. My parents said the brakes grabbed as I applied them and I got caught up in the rough road. (maybe going a little too fast for the condition of the road). Well, I got "back on the horse", as they say, and made it to that school for two years in my very own little green car. It was a true learning experience for me as well as the students. The parents always gave me their help as well as their support. I would see one or another parent nearly every day as they picked up their children after school. Some of the children had a distance to travel, of course, the children living closer would walk home.

The school of 13 students, all eight grades, was a pretty normal situation for the late 50s. We would begin the school day by putting up the flag and saying

the pledge, we had our classes, recess, ate lunch, did our duties and went home. The school house was only one room as most were at that time, however, it was a pretty nice brick building. There were three first graders and one second grader as well as three 8th graders and one 7th grader along with the others filling the grades in between. The older students were so helpful with the little ones. Sometimes a little one would lock his/herself in the outdoor toilet and be pretty upset, or get stung by a wasp, but with the help of the older brother or sister things would be a little easier. They would even help out with one that might get a little sassy or crabby after a long day. Of course, the younger students might tell a parent if the older student got a little out of line. One spring day while playing ball the teacher (that would be me) hit the ball and knocked a hole in the outer part of one of the glass blocks near the top of the building. This block stayed that way for several years, but I noticed one time going past it had been replaced with a *little* different block.

When the weather was bad I would stay at one or another of the parent's homes. I think I made the rounds to every home as the winters had much snow and I lived 13 miles from the schoolhouse. A couple of times a retired parent flew his plane to my home and I would stay at their home during the bad weather. This school closed sometime after 2000 and is now a privately owned building.

The next year I got married to Denzil Rush and we moved to Rapid City as he had a job on the police force. After a short stay we moved back to Winner and made our home in the apartment adjacent to the *then* county jail in the Court House. My husband worked as a deputy sheriff and I worked part time for the Tripp County Superintendent in Winner on the reorganizing of the country schools. After a couple of years my husband and I went back to college at Springfield, SD for more education. I taught a country school in Bon Homme County, north of Tyndall, and Denzil finished his four year degree as well as baby sitting our two babies. I took classes on weekends and summer school and received my two year teaching degree.

After graduation we sold our little trailer home and packed our bags and not too much furniture and moved to Hot Springs, SD where we taught for 17 years. Our first intent was, that I would be a stay-at-home-mom. However, there was a shortage of teachers and I was approached on labor Day to teach in the town with a classroom of thirty-six 6th graders. This was a real challenge for me, my first in a one room classroom. I agreed to start the year for them if they found a babysitter to come into our home and take care of our two children. They found a sitter and she became a "grandma" to my kids forever. I finished the year as the money was needed for this young family, and the babysitting situation was very good so I continued teaching in various grade in Hot Springs. I managed to avoid teaching my own children in the classroom, and we did our best to do the loving and rearing of our children in our home. Hot Springs was a beautiful place

to live and raise our family, we certainly did get to know the Black Hills. Each Christmas we would chop our own tree and what fun. In the classroom we also had a real pine tree brought by a child and his parent from the country. The tree was given to a family in need of a tree as soon as the Christmas break would start. I have many fond memories of both friends and students that I taught during those years. I have crossed paths with many that graduated from high school and living their own lives. I have taught the second and third generation.

Our children received their elementary and high school education during the time spent in Hot Springs. In 1980, after our children now in college and on their own, we decided to move back to Winner and be closer to our family. Denzil is now in administration and I have my 4 year degree after 25 years of going to summer school and weekends or when ever I could pick up an hour or two. I really did not want to get my degree, but my Denzil said, "It's better than any insurance policy." So I finished up with much help from my family and friends. I never did regret getting the degree and little did I know how much I would need it in the future.

After moving back to Tripp County I taught in a rural school for the Winner School district and Denzil was the Rural School Principal. In 1961, he suffered a heart attack, but the recovery was good and we continued to work in the system.

In 1985 Denzil felt the need to try for a Superintendent position in Bennett County and here I taught third graders. This was such a fun time with the eager students. I remember taking field trips with these student to the Bad Lands and also a science trip or two, to La Creek Refuge, in the springtime of the year. On one occasion a huge snapping turtle had his teeth clamped on a ducks leg, never to let go. I said to a student, "Oh, how sad," to this third graders replied, "It's just the balance of nature, Mrs. Rush."

We moved back to Winner, hoping to finish our teaching career and build a new retirement home. This did not happen, as Denzil had a fatal heart attach on June 27, 1990. I was able to return to teaching and here I again had a room full of wonderful sixth graders. They were the most understanding and kind kids anyone could ask for after the difficult summer. I had great support from the administration, the staff and of course the most help came from the classroom. My last years of teaching were in the elementary school with very eager 5th graders. This was in the old building, now where the New Middle School resides, until we moved to the *New West Side Elementary*. This was so much work, yet, so much fun to experience a new school. Here again I met new coworkers and staff that became wonderful friends. About this time I was introduced to the cell phone and the computer. Oh, my!

I always loved getting that new classroom every fall and try to figure out a way to make learning fun. Have you noticed that most walks of life people “go to work” while people in education “go to school”: I think that is great!

I retired in the year 2000 after 42 years of teaching. However, I had been in school for a long time before teaching. I have done some subbing after retiring, I go to a Retired Teacher’s Organization once a month where we share some of our past and present interests. We enjoy having students do the programs for us such as, the oral interpretation students, the 5th graders read their Grandparent’s Essays, the Winner High School choir, and any other students that will share some talent or experience they are having or doing to broaden their education. I listen to elementary students read on Wednesdays. You see, education never quits, I love it and I try to learn something each and every day.

Yes, education has come a long way, but it is still climbing as the field of technology is growing every minute. I almost think I need an undated dictionary. Oh yes, I just need to get on the computer and find the work I need to know about.

I have 2 children that are not in education, however, I have 5 grandchildren and the 2 oldest are majoring in education. Education has been a wonderful like for me. I am proud I chose the field of education for my career.

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