

I survived...Jan Ringstmeyer....Winner, SD

Sometimes I sill forget to put the word retired before teacher. But that is getting easier as I reflect on the 40 years I survived as a music teacher. My very first memory is how excited I was to get an interview and the job. The administrators seemed amused when my face lit up at the mention of the incredible salary of \$7,000. Most of the first year was simply exhausting and somewhat traumatic. The most traumatic memory was the day a sassy 6th grader walked away while I was trying to scold him, I grabbed his arm and as he pulled away I left scratch marks all the way down his arm. After the Principal chewed him out, he said to me “good for you, I didn’t think you had it in you!” I survived but found better ways to discipline. The first Christmas concert had all 500 elementary students from three schools in the armory. After the rehearsal I had a sleepless tearful night, but the next morning the cutest fifth grade boy with the biggest smile said, “Miss Cory, we could see your dimple from the top row of the bleachers.” I survived and gradually concerts improved.

There are many concert memories, especially form long ago when a little boy took off his boot, smelled it and passed it down the row so the others could smell it while they were singing. Over the years, students vomited, fainted, fell off risers, babies wandered around, I had strep throat and other nasty ailments, but I survived. Sometimes children would walk around town until concert time because if they went home, they wouldn’t get to come back, or sometimes parents would drop fof their children, leave and forget to pick them up. My husband got the job of helping me put up risers and chairs and every concert was a worry about the sound equipment working and the weather cooperating. But in the end my hope was always that students had good memories of good musical experiences.

One year I carefully prepped a third grade class on how to behave when the Principal was in the room. The next music class she came in before they did and sat in the back of the room. One little darling didn’t see her and loudly proclaimed, “Is this the day we are supposed to be good because the Principal will be here?” I stammered around and something about how we are to behave every day in music. Once again I survived and fortunately the Principal laughed.

The hardest thing I survived was when the administrators decided to cut the elementary program in half and I would then also teach at the middle school. Many more tears were shed and the first year was hard, but in the end it was a blessing to have a break from the elementary to learn new material and to work with older students.

In 40 years I taught literally thousands of children, I hope I had a positive impact on them. But there is only one I know for sure whose life I influenced. She is my legacy and my daughter. She is an elementary music teacher and nothing is more rewarding than going to her concerts or watching her teach. So as I reflect on the years I survived, I know I thrived and grew and now I am proud to say I am a retired music teacher.