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Inez Schneider Whitney

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A SURPRISE FOR MAMA

By Inez Schneider Whitney

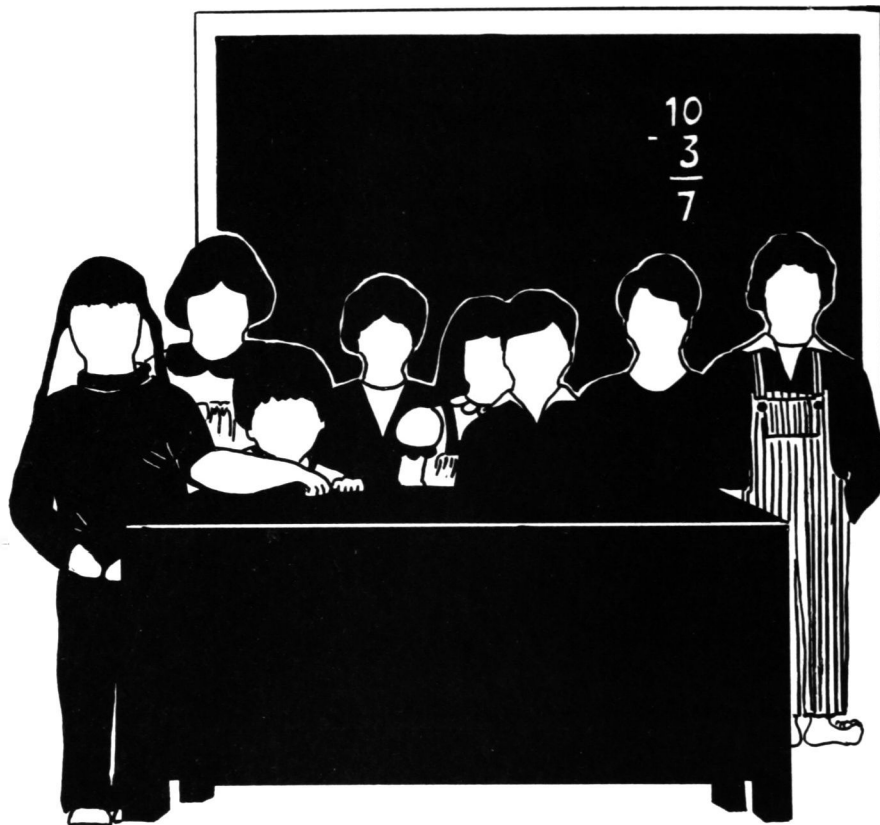


Illustration by Valerie Caulkins Graybill

The year was 1913. I was in Second Grade at Prairie View, a one-room country school near Custer City, Oklahoma. One afternoon just before dismissal, Mr. Garlow, the teacher, knocked on his desk with a ruler.

"Attention, pupils! I'm planning a program for your parents. You will all participate. I have your parts here." He proceeded to pass out slips of paper to all of us and then said, "Memorize your verse tonight. We will start practicing tomorrow."

I couldn't get home fast enough. "Look, Mama," I said as I ran into the house. "I get to speak a piece on a program. Here it is. I'm going to tell about helping Grandma find her glasses."

Mama prided herself that she had

been very proficient in giving recitations in the little Indiana community where she had lived before she came to Oklahoma. She pasted favorite clippings she saved into a scrapbook, most of them poems. She also had a book titled *THE IDEAL ORATOR AND MANUAL OF ELOCUTION*. It had many pictures showing what gestures to use for surprise, grief, meditation, and many others. It was published in 1897, and I still have it.

After quite a search, Mama said, "Here's a recitation that's much better, and it's humorous too. That's what people like."

The next morning, I took the verse to school. I handed it to Mr. Garlow and said, "My mama wants me to say this. She says it's better than the piece you

gave me."

As he read it, a puzzled look came over his face. "Are you sure your mother wants you to use this?"

"Oh yes! And I know it already!"

He shrugged his shoulders and said, "All right."

The night of the program came. Every seat was taken, and many people were standing in the back and along the sides. Each parent eagerly awaited the performance of his offspring.

Finally it was my turn. I was one of eight children who climbed up on a long recitation bench. This made us high enough to be seen by the audience. When we were finally in a straight line, we began. Each one except me recited a verse telling what he did to help Grandma. I was last, and my verse was different. I don't remember all of it, but I do remember these lines:

"Pa, where do the holes in doughnuts go?"

"My pa kept answering 'I dunno.'"

As I finished, there was loud laughter. I thought to myself, "They must have liked mine best."

When the program ended, Mama grabbed me by the hand and said to Papa, "Get the buggy around here in a hurry."

He looked surprised. "Don't you want to visit a little? We always do."

"Not tonight!"

As we waited outside for Papa to come, Mama said, "Inez, I was never so embarrassed. Why didn't you tell me you were in an exercise with other children and everyone was telling what he could do to help Grandma?"

I don't remember what I said, but I suppose like Pa in the recitation, I just answered, "I dunno." ■

INEZ SCHNEIDER WHITNEY, no stranger to regular WESTVIEW readers, once again shares an interesting frontier Western Oklahoma anecdote.