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# Reminiscence Of Early Days Teaching In The Little Red School House.



ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA FICKLING

— by Thelma O. Brandly

*Editor's note: Probably most of our readers who are teachers will agree that Brandly in her one-room schoolhouse had life a great deal harder than most teachers nowadays.*

## MEMORIES

This article is dedicated to all teachers who taught the one-room country schools.

To me, a retired veteran of forty years of school teaching in all levels, from primary through college, learning to "teach school" is not entirely the result of studying college education courses.

I began my teaching career in the autumn of 1928, after I had graduated from high school the preceding spring (thanks to my mother who obtained my first teaching job for me — she was determined that I was to be a school teacher). I began this illustrious career in a two-teacher country school at Leonel; part of the district was in Blaine County and part in Dewey County. I had all of eight hours of college credit, obtained that summer from Southwestern in Weatherford.

At Leonel, Iona Chain, who later married Mike Stephenson, taught the four upper grades and I "kept" the four lower ones. We boarded and roomed with Paul Wills and his three children — Elsie Wills Chain and the twins, Dale and Delbert. He had a housekeeper, Edna Bolster, who now lives in Seiling, Oklahoma. Iona and I had the upstairs room on the north side of the house. During blizzards for which Western Oklahoma was famous, we awoke many a morning to find sprinkles of snow on the quilts which were piled heavily on top of us. As Will Rogers said of Amarillo, Texas, there was nothing but a barbed-wire fence between that Wills house and the North Pole.

That first year, one very mischievous fourth grader I had piled too much soft coal into the "pot-bellied" stove and smothered the fire. When it "came to life," the explosion blew the stove lid to the ceiling!! And, that ceiling was "darn high."

Another thing I remember about that first year — an idea which then was quite common, but which today is seldom heard about — was that one of the men who was on the school board asked me to paddle his son who was too stubborn to do his arithmetic problems.

The next year Iona went to Oakwood to teach, and Bea Martin from Canton, Oklahoma, taught the upper grades. She drove from Canton. I continued to live with the Wills family. I enjoyed every minute of my stay with them. Many lively and provocative events happened — one being the twins setting Paul's big barn on fire when they were smoking in the hay loft.

Also that was the year of the "Big Snow"; the drifts covered fences, filled roads, and generally brought travel to a complete standstill. When the storm subsided somewhat, Bea tried to drive her car to school. She became stuck in a big drift, and Paul Wills had to wade through huge drifts to rescue her and her dog, Fifi, who went everywhere she went. Her students loved to have the dog in the school room. At the time of the Big Snow, I was "keeping company" with a young man who lived close enough to the Wills to walk or to ride his horse; so my "Love Life" did not suffer much except, of course, that there was always an audience in the living room — what with Mr. Wills, Elsie, Dale, Delbert, and Edna there also.

From Leonel, I went to West Point, sometimes referred to as "Pig Hill" school. The nickname "Pig Hill" came from the fact that a farmer who lived nearby let his pigs run loose and somehow they, the pigs, always found their way to "school." Here I had all eight grades. Pearl Wilson was the county superintendent at the time. At that time, the county superintendent came to each of the country schools to evaluate it. During the inspection, which usually lasted a couple of hours, the superintendent would question the students in the different classes, testing them in what they were supposed to be learning. Alvin McGinnis was my eighth grader; so, of course, Mrs. Wilson called upon him to "show his skill" in arithmetic. I don't know who was more nervous and scared — Alvin or I.

At West Point, I also taught Cleo and Lavern Hart, Dorothy Hutton Fauchier, the McVay children, Willadean McGinnis, Verna Joy, and others.

This was the year my sister, Clara, and I bought a new car. It was a Model A Coupe. We were really becoming "big time." Clara taught a school over on the South Canadian River, southwest of Seiling. Thus, she drove the car most of the time. I either walked the three or four miles through the woods or rode horseback from the "Mansion on a hill" about eight miles northwest of Oakwood.

I remember one incident that happened that year; now after many years, I can laugh at it, but at that time I was very upset about it. For some reason, I had taken my pre-school brother, Harvey Dean, to school with me that day. Clara had dropped us off that morning and was to pick us up that evening. Well, something happened and she did not come for us. So, after waiting until nearly sundown, we started walking the five miles home, by way of the Dean Hutton place because I reasoned that Clara would eventually overtake us. But we kept on walking; the sun went down, and dark hovered over us. Poor little Harve became so tired — I was half dragging and half carrying him. By the time we reached the Joe Hajny place, dark had really caught us. The Hajnys had two big dogs which always came tearing out to the road. We lost no time sneaking by and for once the dogs remained at the house. Our biggest fright came when we reached the big bridge over the deep canyon east of home. There had been wild tales told about the mountain lion, bobcat, or some other ferocious animal that was supposed to be in the canyon. Some had heard it scream, and others had even claimed that they had seen it. Well, after getting by the cemetery — this was also an eerie area after dark — Harve and I were not wasting any time when we hit the bridge! I think I was carrying Harve; at least his short legs were not hitting the ground every step. When we reached the top of the hill on the other side of the bridge, both of us breathed a sigh of relief.

From West Point, I went to Harvard, a lovely little country school, northeast of Fay, Oklahoma. My students were some of the best I have ever known; the Deweys, the Stanleys, the Humphreys, Ann Conner and her brothers, the Kennedys, and many others, including Glen Widney, who started to school that term. I roomed and boarded with Glen's parents, Will and Elsie Widney, until I married. Glen liked to play around outside until I had done the janitor work (oh, yes, the teacher then did her own janitoring, etc.); then he would walk home with me.

Another "learning experience" I met with this term had to do with my changing my name. I married in January. I then drove from Oakwood, where John and I were living, and on the way I picked up one of my second graders. Several mornings I noticed she was very quiet and seemed disturbed. Finally, she asked me whether or not she could call me "Miss Brandly as before; she said Miss Brandly sounded much better than Mrs. Butts. Her mother told me later that the child didn't want to say the word "butts." Oh, the joy of a child's innocence!

Time passed; and before I finished my six years of teaching in the country schools (usually all eight grades), I do believe I had learned, at least, "to keep order" in a school room; and generally, if there is order, there is some learning going on. I was never bothered much with the discipline problem. I was usually on the playground with the kids, and they liked this. We played ball; sometimes we had only a string ball and a board for a bat, but we had "FUN."

I remember one incident when I was teaching at Fairmont School, west of Oakwood. When we played ball, I was usually the "pitcher" for both sides. One day, Laurence Barber, an eighth grader, hit the ball. It came straight at me, making perfect contact with my eye! What

a sight I was for several days! A teacher with a swollen face and a closed black eye — everyone teased Laurence about his giving his teacher a black eye.

My teaching all grades ended when in 1935, I left Fairmont and entered the Oakwood School System. The first year, I taught the fifth grade; the next year the seventh-eighth grade teacher quit, and I took her place until 1939.

During my stay in Oakwood, I taught many wonderful students, who now have children and grandchildren. And, of course, some of the boys and girls have now "gone away"; I feel sad when I remember these, but I am sure the Lord knows best. I think I have taught nearly all of the younger people in and around Oakwood.

I remember one, Earl Wills, who I feel I helped by persuading him to return to school and finish the eighth grade. Earl had become discouraged the year before and had quit. My husband and I persuaded him to complete the eighth grade. No one was ever prouder of a student than I on graduation night when Earl received his diploma.

From Oakwood, I went to Longdale, then to Purcell and in 1954 to Clinton. In 1962, I joined the faculty of Southwestern State College. I retired from the college in 1971 as Associate Professor. Thus, I ended a teaching career of forty years.

I truly believe that although I studied the necessary education courses and I do realize these are important, the experiences I had working in the country schools, teaching all grades, and being not only teacher but also disciplinarian, mother, judge, nurse, doctor, confessor, janitor, etc. really gave me the understanding and patience that enabled me to help my students with their problems, disappointments, fears, desires, hopes, and aspirations.

Someone has said that "Experience is a dear school, but a fool will learn in no other." Thus, when I remember that in 1928, just out of high school, I began my teaching career with only eight hours of college credit, I have to admit that I surely was that proverbial fool to undertake such responsibilities. Be that as it may, I have received many values from and have garnered such great and lasting memories of my forty years. During such a long span, naturally one can recall many times when he thrilled to a student's learning. However, I believe that my greatest moments came when one of my "little people" remembered a word, learned to write his name, or perhaps added his numbers correctly. A little innocent child can truly "bless one's heart" by looking up with eager surprise when he remembers something one has taught him.

Over two-thirds of my life has been spent in "going to school" and in "teaching school"; I do recognize that all the learning did give me direction. But those early years which I spent in the "little red school house" really gave me the solid foundation which I needed for teaching and for "keeping" school.

I feel that I have had a full and rewarding life because I have had the privilege of sharing so many pleasant and great experiences with the young. ■



ILLUSTRATION BY PATRICIA SHERMAN