

The Case of the Zestful Grandmother Ella Zakariassen.

As Ella Cruteau I was born 55 years ago on a farm in Ontario with my Grandmother Cruteau acting as midwife. I was the third child and oldest daughter in a family which was later to increase to six children. Although born in Ontario, I lived there only a few weeks before my parents heeded the slogan of the times "Go West." They finally settled in the small railroad town of Sutherland which is now a part of Saskatoon, Sask.

My father, a C.P.R. brakeman, was a quiet, reserved man who loved his home and family. He was a lover of the outdoors and an avid reader. His oldest daughter inherited these traits. My mother, an impetuous, impatient woman of Irish peasant stock was very domestic and had time for little else than the many household tasks without modern conveniences and appliances.

I consider my childhood average, with both happy and unhappy times. My two brothers who were two years older and two years younger than I, were my favorites. As the trio we played games with the neighborhood children, went on outdoor jaunts and generally enjoyed the wonders of nature. I hardly knew my two younger sisters until after I left home due to the age differential, but now we have a very close relationship with each other.

My school career commenced at age six when I was enrolled in

Sutherland School, a graded school staffed by excellent teachers. As a result of this instruction and a keen desire to learn I completed eight grades in seven years, passing Grade Eight Departmentals with Honours. On the Simon-Nelson Tests my raw score of 81 probably indicates my ability to do this.

My parents, although they only had elementary educations themselves, insisted that we children receive the best possible educations. Finances were limited but education to them was an essential. Many times I've heard my Dad say, "An education isn't heavy to carry around."

My High School years were spent in Saskatoon Collegiates with Mathematics and French the subjects I most enjoyed and Latin, the least enjoyable. Although red hair, freckles and migraine headaches plagued my adolescent years, I persevered and obtained my Senior Matriculation at age seventeen.

Frequent trips to Eastern Canada in summer holidays added to my geographical knowledge and broke the monotony.

Since teaching had been my goal from Primary grades, it was natural that I should enrol in the Saskatoon Normal School in 1931. The \$25.00 tuition fee attracted many other students to the teaching profession also since this was early in the Great Depression. No student teaching was done in rural schools that year although each one

of us was expected to staff a multi-graded rural school. Armed with an Interim First Class Teacher's certificate I was full of hope, but in the autumn of 1932 there were at least ten teachers for every classroom in Saskatchewan, and Ella Brateau was not in one of these classrooms. Four months and hundreds of applications later brought the reward of a country school in Northern Saskatchewan. Later I learned that it was my French name and low bid that cinched the job for me. A salary of \$350 a year, 35 pupils in eleven grades with the janitor work thrown in for good measure would not seem very inviting to a teacher in today's world. "A nickel a pupil a day" didn't enter my mind until many years later. I was just glad that January day to know that I would be in a classroom.

Perhaps that is the reason I rated high in responsibility on the Gordon Personal Profile. I had no choice but to accept responsibility.

In my first school we had a bare minimum of textbooks and few supplies and no workbooks as they had not as yet come into use. The teacher's enthusiasm and initiative had to be drawn upon to make each day worthwhile. I loved the rural children as I was inclined to be of a reserved nature and could find a common bond between us. They were eager to teach me many aspects of rural life. The rural people were so sincere and took the "schoolmarm"

to their bosoms.

After an enjoyable two years in my rural school, I applied for and was accepted as teacher of the Primary room in the nearby village. Now I only had six grades and 52 pupils and a salary of \$500 a year!

The Depression was at its height and since money was scarce and very few people could afford the luxury of a car, people were closer to each other and did not require ready-made entertainment. Curling, skating, Christmas Concerts, picnics, dances & Sports Days offered cheap but pleasant entertainment. The teacher would be escorted to these by one of the local swains, and had I decided to marry one of these pleasant lads, I might now be a rich farmer's wife instead of a poor schoolteacher!

In 1938 I decided I was in a rut and resigned from my village school at the end of June, and took a position in the Municipal Office preparing tax notices. Two months of office work, although enjoyable, proved to me that I preferred the teaching profession and contact with children. Answering an advertisement from the Alberta Dept. of Education, I accepted a teaching position in a rural school thirteen miles from Delia. Seven pupils, seven grades and a salary of \$700 a year was indeed a promotion! In this school I found a variety of personalities and problems and I

enjoyed my two mile ride on horseback to and from school. It wasn't so pleasant when snow was several feet deep and the thermometer ranged around 30° below zero.

In the summer before World War II erupted, I attended Summer School in Calgary and as a result was recommended for my Permanent Alberta Certificate. I had never been able to afford Summer School on my previous salaries. Being of an energetic nature so few pupils offered little challenge and after another year at Blair School, I asked for a school with a larger enrolment. This time I was sent to another rural school between Delia and Craigmyle, with an enrolment of 28 pupils and again I had nine grades to teach. In both of these schools I found interesting children and in the latter school I particularly enjoyed the Junior High group.

Following a year in Georgetown School I decided to abandon the teaching profession and became the wife of Sidney Zakariassen. At that time few married women teachers were staffing classrooms, so I gave no thought to continuing my teaching career. Living on a salary of \$80 a month in the village of Brynmar was not always easy but my experience in financial matters during the '30's was beneficial. Sometimes nearing the end of the month we had more north than

money. We had each other though and were compatible.

By the end of two and a half years of marriage we had two daughters and had moved to a modest home in Drumheller. I enjoyed the domestic life although I sometimes felt frustration and desired more outside interests. Handicrafts, sewing and knitting filled what might have been boring hours and the girls were in school. Occasionally I did substitute teaching and enjoyed the classroom again as well as the remuneration.

In 1950, at the suggestion of the Superintendent, I decided to combine my two careers and accepted the Grade One & Two room in the old Parkdale Cottage School. Again I had a typical rural situation except that there were only two grades. The heavy enrolment of 42 pupils and the attempt to operate and home as efficiently as formerly almost resulted in a nervous breakdown. Then I learned I must relax. Being a near-perfectionist in many things I found it difficult to change. I had also expected near-perfection from my pupils and from my daughters but the years have mellowed me and I look back with regret at the demands I made of myself and others. The extra salary provided household help which relieved me of ^{some of} my domestic chores. It also provided luxuries we were not formerly able to enjoy.

and later helped with the University Educations of our daughters.

With the help of a loving, co-operative and understanding husband and two loving daughters we soon became a well-adjusted family. My own two children gave me a better understanding how to cope with six and seven year olds and I enjoyed primary teaching more than I had when confronted with several other grades. Patience is a necessary virtue when dealing with children at this age level.

In the nineteen years since returning to the teaching profession I have seen many changes in teaching techniques and attitudes of children. It is indeed a challenge to retain the interest of children who are so much more knowledgeable today due to mass media.

After six years teaching a double grade with a heavy enrollment, the new three room Parkdale School was opened and I had to decide whether I would take the Grade One or Grade Two Class and decided on the former. It was a pleasurable experience having two other members on staff who were very congenial. It came as a shock nine years later to hear that Parkdale was being closed and that our staff would be absorbed in East End School. A lively, interesting class compensated for the dark, dirty, dilapidated building in which we taught. Parkdale opened again the next year on what

was to be a temporary basis. The insecurity made me decide to accept a teaching position at St. Anthony's where I would again have a Grade One class. This move I have not regretted but recall with fond memories my especially happy years at Parkdale.

Within the past month my husband received notice of a transfer to Forestburg. This was indeed a shock for us and after much deliberation we came to the mutual agreement that it would be unwise to accept the transfer. Financially it would be a loss as my pension benefits were superior to those of my husband and our salaries were comparable. As a result the transfer was refused. We were delighted a week later when my husband received notification from Head Office that his services would be retained in another department of the Canadian Utilities office in Drumheller. It was fortunate that "We" decided to refuse the transfer.

On the Kuder Preference Record Outdoor, Artistic and Social Service were well up in the Top Quartile. Gardening, camping and nature walks occupy many of my leisure hours in the summer. From my busy fingers emerge many knitted garments and dressmaking "creations". Church work and the local Hospital Auxiliary are among my social service interests. Here I can put my artistic talents to a profitable use knitting baby sets.

for sale or donation to indigent mothers. Being an ardent hockey fan, with my husband, I enjoy cheering for the home team and have an opportunity to "let off steam".

A few years hence I shall have to give some consideration to how I will expend my surplus energy upon retirement from the teaching profession. I may attempt to write a book on helpful, tested, ideas and projects for Primary Teachers. It may never be published but it would be fun to write it! Operating a private kindergarten would be interesting also. The Dinokaur Museum might by that time require the services of another old fossil and the part time work would be enjoyable. Of course indulging our grandchildren will be high on my list of projects. Blessed with good health we hope to do some travelling also. Most of all I intend to keep my brain active and who knows I may even earn my B. Ed. degree!

Was it Confucius or Anonymous who wrote "Grow old along with me,
The Best is yet to be."