

TEACHING IN THE 1930's

One month after my 18th birthday, in May 1932, I graduated from the Saskatoon Normal School with a First Class Teaching Certificate and little else. Due to the "Depression" or "Hungry 30's" as it was later to be called, we had had no Rural Teaching experience yet were qualified and expected to be able to teach all grades from one to twelve in a rural setting. Only experienced teachers were able to obtain positions in town or city schools. For my Public School education, I had only attended Sutherland School where there were only one or two grades in each classroom. High School had been taken at Nutana Collegiate in Saskatoon for grades 9 and 10 and at City Park Collegiate for grades 11 and 12.

At the time I graduated from Normal School there were about 20 or more teachers for every available classroom. That summer I answered at least 250 "Teachers Wanted" ads, all hand written. In your replies you were required to state your age, religion and what you were willing to accept for a yearly salary. I thought I was worth at least \$750 a year. Poor innocent me -- no answers. Thinking I'd take a little less in order to get experience and qualify for my Permanent Certificate, my salary quotes came DOWN, DOWN, DOWN -- no replies by September 1 and no job! That fall I coached a Grade 12 girl in Math for a few dollars and subbed a few times at about \$1.75 a day if I remember correctly or it may even have been less. In the meantime, I lived off my parents.

On Friday, January 13, 1933 I finally got a response to my numerous

applications. I was asked to teach at Trombley School No. 1811 (I think) at Crystal Springs, Saskatchewan. I phoned to accept and found I had agreed to teach for \$350.00 a YEAR. My duties were to commence on January 23rd.

I packed my 2 or 3 dresses, a skirt or two and a couple of sweaters, my lingerie and that was my entire wardrobe. It all fitted into one suitcase. I also had a trunk BRAND NEW into which went the "Books of Knowledge", some food as I had a teacherage and other personal treasures. My train left at midnight (Dad had gotten me a pass). At Lanigan I had to change trains and wait in a dreary station for several hours to make connections with the C.P.R. train north to Crystal Springs. On a frosty January 20 morning, I stepped off the train in Crystal Springs at 7:30 A.M. I saw a small hamlet that had only been on the rail line for a year or two. My Dad had worked on a work train in 1930 when the line was being built from Lanigan to Prince Albert so was familiar with the Crystal Springs area and was known to the railway crew and Station Agent.

I was to be picked up by one of the members of the school board around 10 A.M. so the friendly Station Agent, Leslie Watts and his wife Betty, made me comfortable for the 2-1/2 hours until his arrival. I'm sure Mr. Viens was surprised to see a red-headed Irish gal instead of a dark haired French girl as the name CROTEAU had probably suggested in my application. I realized I had, no doubt, gotten the job because of my French name, the fact that I was Catholic and willing to teach for \$350 a year. (At this point I might note that many teachers at that time were teaching for a dollar a day and their board and room. They moved from one boarding place to another and

and the cost of their board and room was taken off their landlord's taxes. Some teachers never ever received their wages or only a partial payment. I was one of the fortunate ones!!!)

My trunk and suitcase were loaded into a big, box sleigh pulled by a team of horses and off we went to travel the four miles to my teacherage. My clothing was warm and I had on a good pair of galoshes (or overshoes) and my shoes. Of course, in those days, ladies and girls didn't wear slacks. We stopped after a frosty journey of about 3 miles at the Viens residence. Mr. Viens spoke broken English and his wife would only speak French so you can understand my dilemma. We had fish for dinner and as I timidly picked out the bones, Mr. Viens said, "Don't you like fish?" I couldn't figure out if I was to eat bones and all!

An hour or two after our noon dinner, off we went again, this time to what would be my home for the next two years. We arrived in mid-afternoon at the teacherage and school. The teacherage consisted of two rooms and in each room was a wood burning stove which I soon appreciated. The main room had linoleum covering the floor, a kitchen cabinet, a table, a couple of chairs, a rocking chair and a wood box which was home-made, about 3 feet square and of the same height. The bedroom had an iron bedstead, a dresser, some curtained shelves across the corner, a tin stove and a curtained alcove behind the door which was ample to hold my meagre wardrobe.

After lighting a fire in both stoves, we then went over to the school.

In the main classroom was the usual Waterman-Waterbury stove with stove-pipes that ran the length of the classroom for additional heat. There were numerous double desks, a dilapidated organ, a homemade bookcase containing a few books and a teacher's desk and chair. I could see at once that my Books of Knowledge would be my salvation.

In the school yard was the barn to stable any horses that fortunate children might have as transportation and two 2-hole privies (or better known as outdoor toilets) -- one for girls and one for boys. These would invariably have 6 or more inches of snow on the seats in winter so as few trips as possible were made in a day and there was no loitering I can assure you. Footprints were often found in the snow that remained on the seats after vain attempt to remove them. I imagine that many kids assumed a squatting position and I couldn't blame them.

The schoolyard had about 50 cords of poplar wood piled in it in lengths suitable for the teacherage stoves and the school stove or furnace as it was sometimes called. At 49¢ a cord (8' x 4' x 2') there was no shortage of wood -- and for that 49¢ the wood was cut, split and piled in the schoolyard. A familiar comment made when a deal was being made was "Is that cash or wood?" Supplying wood for the school could be taken off the farmers' taxes.

Mr. Viens left and I was left alone as night descended about 4:00 PM. I lit my coal oil lamp, shed some tears and dug into my trunk to see what goodies from home would provide my supper. The week-end is sketchy in my memory -- I may have gone to town with one of the nearest neighbors who

lived more than a half mile away. I know I wouldn't have wanted either of my daughters to have been in my shoes when they were 18.

Monday morning, January 23, arrived and I was up at 6 A.M. to build fires -- all four of them as I was also the janitor for an extra \$5.00 a month. Often I would get up at 2 A.M. and replenish the teacherage fires by adding several sticks of wood to the few remaining embers. When my nose got cold, I knew the fires were low. I wonder if my poor sleeping habits of today are a reversion to my teacherage days. Many times I made several trips over to the school to see the progress of the fire I had built only to find that it was OUT, so I had to start it all over again. Often we wore our outdoor clothing until noon. I'm sure I don't know what I would have done without the help of coal oil and it is a wonder that both the fire and I didn't go out the roof. My hair and eyebrows got singed a few times. For the unenlightened, coal oil was a kind of kerosene fuel used in lamps in "the good old days". I provided my own coal oil and I'm sure my \$5.00 janitor's wage went to pay for coal oil each month.

To get back to the first morning of school -- at a quarter to nine, I pulled on the bell rope in the porch of the school and the huge bell clanged to alert any errant pupils that they had 15 minutes to make the nine o'clock deadline. I think some of the parents who lived a mile or more away also could hear the bell and checked their clocks at the same time since very few had even primitive radios. I didn't own a radio so trusted my watch was correct.

There were about 35 pupils listed on the register in all grades from 1 - 10. Later in the year a Grade 11 girl, older than I registered to upgrade her French so she could write her Departmental exam in June. Before June arrived a Singer Sewing Machine Salesman arrived and he and Emily eloped!!

I don't know who was the more nervous, the pupils or I, that first morning. They were very helpful and more or less told me the usual procedures. I did get tired after a while hearing "Miss Joudry didn't do it that way". I managed to survive the day even to the last half hour when the Protestant children were dismissed and the Catholic children remained for their half hour of Religion Classes. I had to teach the Turgeon children (their father was Chairman of the School Board and a very nice man) in French!! I read the questions in "Fractured French" and trusted the answers they gave corresponded to the answers in the Catechism. No explanation! The other kids did the same in English. We struggled through.

It was a real challenge to try to spend a little time with each grade and frequently grades had to be combined for some subjects. The children who finished their work would listen to what was going on in the other grades or the brighter children would help the slower ones. The Grade 9 and 10 pupils had Correspondence pamphlets outlining the work they were to do in each subject and they were given assignments which I was required to correct. The midnight oil was frequently burned. To say I earned my salary is an understatement. Years later my brother-in-law, Harvey Zakariasen, calculated that I was getting "A nickel, a pupil, a day".

The winter wore on -- the kids carried in wood for the school fires at recess and filled the wood box in the school porch. If the weather was suitable they played games in the snow at recess or the boys adjourned to the barn to do their manly chores. Some of the kids stayed in the school and played games such as X and O's or "Hang the Man" -- a word guessing game. In cold weather recesses were short and in warmer weather they were longer.

BARN, BOOTLEG AND BUGS

As I've said previously, the barn was used for more than stabling the horses. I'm sure it was used instead of the building marked BOYS so I didn't make a point of investigating what went on there. One lovely spring day when the snow was melting (it was sometimes drifted 3 feet deep in the winter) the children came in from their fun at the end of the afternoon recess. The boys seemed in a jolly mood but I asked no questions. Dismissal time came and off went the kids. About an hour later one of the Grade 8 girls who lived about a mile away returned with a note from her Mother. After reading it I was shocked. Apparently the boys had found a partial bottle of "white lightning" that had been cached in the snow during one of the week-end dances and the owner hadn't been able to retrieve it later in the dark. When spring came and the snow receded, the bottle appeared. The logical place to sample the contents was the barn. I imagine some of the older boys had already sampled similar contents at home.

One of the local farmers was an expert in the distillery business.

Every year (I was told) he was visited by the R.C.M.P. and one of his boys took the rap and had a warm winter in Prince Albert jail with plenty to eat.

After receiving the note, I phoned the Secretary of the School Board, Mr. Jondro. He just laughed and told me not to worry -- his son had been one of the participants. As the phone was on a party line, everyone in the district soon knew of the episode.

Dances were held in the school every few weeks and the teacherage was used as a place to put the lunch and make the coffee. Babies were also put on my bed on occasion. Soon I discovered I was having more than babies deposited on my bed -- bedbugs! I took a rag soaked in coal oil and went all around the seams of the mattress and there were plenty of visitors. I did this on a regular basis so think I eradicated them. The first time I had ever seen a bedbug was when I was sitting in the double seat with one of the Grade 6 girls and a bug crawled down her notebook. I asked what it was and the reply was "It's ONLY a bedbug". It is easy to tell one as they have a horrible distinctive odor when squashed!

I also had mice in both school and teacherage. At night I could hear the mice scampering in the attic and between the walls.

In the spring I did a little spring cleaning and in the process moved the kitchen cabinet. There was a splash and I discovered a partial bottle of white lightening tipped over. It had been stashed between the wall and the back of the cabinet by someone. When I poured some into the fire it

burned with a beautiful blue flame. Had I known it was there I might have saved my coal oil! I'm sure it was 90-Proof.

My first cheque came at the end of March and it was a blessing. I had been receiving money from home and the freight crew often left "CARE" packages for me that had been sent by my parents. The packages would be left with the Station Agent in Crystal Springs and one of the neighbors would bring it out to me when they were in town -- usually Mr. Drew who also brought my mail to their place. I would walk over and get my mail (about a mile away, over a stile and across the fields). Sometimes their hired man who worked for \$5.00 a month and his board and tobacco would bring mail, groceries and CARE parcels over to me and spend the evening.

The Drews were well educated people. Mr. Drew Sr. was the Justice of the Peace and had an M.A. Degree. His wife who was confined to a wheel chair due to arthritis had her B.A. I think both had been teachers in Minneapolis and had come to Canada to homestead and make their fortune. Mrs. Drew's arthritis was the result of living in a large drafty granary for two years while their large home was being built. Their son, Ralph, had a bad leg as a result of a shooting accident and was the one in charge of the farming. Ralph's wife, Diane, was a charming little French lady of about 28 when I first met her. Her brother was the Mr. Viens who had met me at the train on my arrival in Crystal Springs. I often visited at the Drew's and enjoyed the many books at my disposal when I had time to read. Ralph and his brother who remained in the States were both University graduates. The elder Drews seemed very old to me but were probably only in their late 50's. Ralph was much older than Diane.

One time before I got my cheque, I was down to my last 3¢ stamp (the postage rate at that time) so I wrote a letter home, put the stamp on and told Mother in the letter that that was my last stamp. I received a letter and some stamps on the next mail. Mail delivery was much faster in those days.

At Easter I went home for a 10 day holiday. I had gained about 15 lbs. since January. I had probably weighed 100 lbs. soaking wet when I left home as I was always a skinny kid. Every time I had felt lonesome in the teacherage, I thought I was hungry and ate a big bowl of corn flakes and canned milk. When I cut out that menu, I reverted to my usual 100 to 105 lbs.

I enjoyed the beautiful country air in the spring months and really liked my rural environment as I've always been a lover of nature.

On rainy days or in the winter's stormy days, I had very few pupils, usually some of the older children so we would conduct school in the teacherage. We all enjoyed the change.

In May and June, I gave extra classes after school to the four Grade 8 students who were obliged to write Departmental exams to be marked in Regina. All passed.

In June, I had a visit from the School Inspector sent out by the Department of Education. Mr. Piercy was a very nice man and gave me a good report. Inspectors were to be dreaded as your future tenure often depended upon the report you received. At that time you could be dismissed at Christmas time or the end of June for any minor reason, even for personal reasons of a Board Member. Times have changed in so many ways. The girl who had been teaching at Trombley from September to December prior to my arrival had been dismissed for no particular reason.

At the end of June, I went home for six weeks and I was to resume my teaching duties in mid-August. I took advantage of that time to attend the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, taking a course in Primary Methods. I got an A on the course. One of our assignments was "My Experiences as a Teacher". At the conclusion of my essay I waxed philosophical and wrote "Once a teacher always a teacher".

My lady Prof's comment after giving me an A was "What if some interesting young man should offer you a cooking position"? She was a maiden lady in her 30's probably!

At Normal School we had taken useless courses such as History of Education, Instalment Buying (something NEW) and making useless charts. I just taught the way I had been taught by excellent teachers and used my common sense. I did learn how to mark a school register though!

I believe Ollie came back with me that August and spent a couple of weeks. She was only 11 at the time so it was a new adventure to attend a country school. I think Mother came up to take her home in time for her

school re-opening. Harvesting was in full swing and the countryside was beautiful and I enjoyed the autumn colors a short time later. Just across from the school was a grain field belonging to the Turgeons. After school the boys who were my age or a little older persuaded me to help with the stooking. I had a pair of "breeks" or breeches that I wore to curl in so I donned those. Knowing nothing about the art of farming, I asked how many bundles I should put in a stook. These fellows were full of tricks so told me about 16 or 17 -- the usual number was 8 I believe. As a result I had a stack instead of a stook. They enjoyed playing tricks on the greenhorn teacher.

Before freeze-up, Mr. Piercy, the Inspector paid me another visit and gave me another good report.