

My Life as a Teacher

My “soaps” are finished for the day and I’m sitting here in my dining room watching the trees whipping around in the strong wind and wondering if the rains will ever come. It gets drier every day and the farmers need something to cheer up their lives. My flowers I carried out in pots and placed so carefully around the N.E. tree were rolling around so I’ve set them up close to the porch, thinking the wind might cease before watering time. Now, shall I write some more of my Story?

I always loved to teach. When very young I got my dolls together and told them stories. I think they believed me. Long before I was old enough for the first grade, my brothers and sisters and I had “classes” at home and I always wanted to be the teacher. An older sister, Marie, was never very strong and didn’t seem to mind if I went ahead with things. When I was told in no uncertain terms at school I couldn’t go there until Sept.- after I was 6 in April – I settled down to business at home and learned all Marie’s lessons. Finally getting to class in Odin – where my Daddy was working in the coal mine at the time – I was happy as a lark but knew most that they were trying to teach me. My teacher said, “You’ve been to school before.” I said, “Yes, but not for long.” I’ll never forget that tearful trip home in 1906 when I “just wasn’t old enough.” I did everything I could to help the teacher and to help out the other pupils. I must have been a pest. But I did learn a few new things. Usually if I worked hard enough I could stay at the head of the class. Maybe that was the teacher popping out even then.

At the end of my fourth year I left early (April 1<sup>st</sup> when miners came out as usual on strike) and we moved back to Kinmundy. That Fall we were on our farm again (where Brother Russell lives today) and going to Shanghai School 2 miles North in the country. There was no fifth grade so I went into the 6<sup>th</sup> with Betty Swift (Lela’s sister) as teacher. I was younger than others in the grade but must have been “gutsy” for Betty let me help her a lot of times. Often she had more than one class and was patient and sweet with us all. Nothing was going to stop

*me now – some day I'd be a teacher too – maybe not as good-looking as Betty but I'd be one.*

*The next year Irene See as teacher did not quell any of my ambition. And finally in eighth grade our teacher, Earl Morris, fired our ambitions until the whole grade decided we'd better go on to High School. So at 13, in the Fall of 1914, I walked down the track South to Kinmundy High School. Two whole miles, but who cared? We studied German 2 whole years under Gus Spitze. But then the war in Europe was so bad German was dropped. When any teacher was absent, and I was asked to teach, I always jumped at the chance. In High School or the Grades (which were then in the same building) I got lots of experience before I graduated in 1918 when I was barely 17. So that's when my Dad borrowed \$200.00 from Building & Loan on our country home and sent me off to Charleston (E.I.) to really learn to be a teacher. I studied hard under Dr. Livingston C. Lord and Miss Skeffington, and Mr. Thomas and a wonderful P.E. teacher and others. I didn't waste any time and the next Spring I was 18 and Mr. Wormley – on Grade Board in Kinmundy – asked me to come home and teach a large Seventh Grade, plus Eithth Grade - 3 forty minute periods while Miss Polly Baggott taught in High School. Miss Polly was Irish and a strict disciplinarian and that Eighth Grade was always ready to "cut loose" when they came to my room to be taught. Besides I had to watch the Seventh Grade at the same time. I did it somehow. No grade I ever taught from then to the time I was 70 was ever hard again. I found out early "you have to set down on 'em hard."*

*And besides, I had so many sweet kids that year, Wilma Boughers was small and dainty and smart. Pearl and Mary Shufeldt were a joy to know. Faye McLaine (later Brasel) and her young sister were there. And Scoop Schooley (who they said was hard to handle) was a Lamb when he found out how I loved history – and he did too. Clyde Morgan was so good and smart and hugged me every time he came back to Kinmundy as long as he lived. I loved 'em all – and there were so many – but Florus Carmean in Eighth Grade simply wouldn't study – always sat in front seat at my bequest and I thought he'd never amount to anything. I hope I planted a seed – he really settled*

*down in High School and turned out to be a fine man. I never really gave up on any of them. I studied all as I taught, stayed at home to save money, got paid \$455.00 for my entire year of teaching – and went back to Charleston, E.I., the following year to get to be a certified teacher.*

*There I spent much time on my student teaching and received good grades. I taught Bible History in Fourth Grade, English in 2<sup>nd</sup> yr. High School, and American History in Eighth Grade. Of course, I had other subjects too but these were my pets. Nearing the end of the year, a former Charleston resident, then Supt. in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, came back as usual to find teachers in Charleston. He watched me teach History and urged me to come to Glen Ellyn. When I told him I wasn't yet 20 at the time, he said, "We just won't tell 'em how old you are until they hire you." I got the job for \$1065.00 (I believe) that first year and I was in Departmental work, 6<sup>th</sup>, Seventh, and Eighth Grades. And what a wonderful place to be. (Some of this was mentioned earlier in the basketball story.)*

*It was a beautiful town with hills and beautiful homes built back in the woods as well as along the nice streets. The people worked in Chicago but were all so interested in their kids in school. So the teachers were treated royally, out to eat and be entertained so often. I learned to Roller skate, and Ice skate (on Lake Ellyn) and ski down the slopes on ski sleds. I even tore the ligaments loose on one ankle as I jumped rope with my pupils (my skirt was long) and pupils pulled me around in wagon for weeks until ankle healed. 'Twas worse than a break but Myrtle Barnes took care of me. Since then I hear from her even now and she's long lived in California. She's even been at my house visiting since I married and her husband teased her that her hair was whiter than mine.*

*Benjamin March, a lawyer in Chicago, had a fine big home in Glen Ellyn and was president of the school board. He and other members came in groups and watched the teaching. My palms were wet but my voice was clear and strong. I had 2 March children in school. It seemed all were good students there at Duane Street School. My assemblies as they studied were 300 sometimes. But I didn't let that bother me (Remember*

*I had that hard grade – double – in Kinmundy when I was 18.) So this couldn't get to me. Even when John Brady practiced balancing his study book on his head instead of studying. I just gave him a swish as I went by and startled him so he'd try something else next time.*

*We did “extra-curricular” things too. Studying the Lincoln-Douglas debates in Eighth Grade, we decided to give them before the Assembly. John Clark, a small brilliant boy, was Douglas. A large boy, smart but a little lazy, was Lincoln. They learned much of the material word by word and put on a fantastic show. A teacher there for the day from Evanston – just observing – wanted me to come to her school to teach. But I didn't leave Glen Ellyn until I was ready to marry. The last year there I set the price of \$1485.00 (a huge salary then). I forgot to say – the first year in Glen Ellyn I started a girl's P.E. class since they didn't have one. They didn't have a gym so we used a deserted church. The next year the parents were so impressed, they got a full time Girl's P.E. teacher and I spent all my time teaching history. I loved every minute of my 4 years there and was urged to stay on. But it was time for my husband so I was married. And stayed out of teaching 33 years.*

*During that 33 years I was always interested in the schools and took part in anything that came along in my children's school life. I was often Room Mother and even P.T.A. President. I thought my teaching days were over. Then in 1957 with my baby Quentin in High School a great teacher shortage came. I was conned into being substitute 36 days that year and offered a full time job for the next. It was about as easy to go every day as to “always be ready to go at a moment's notice.” So I went to Salem and took the Teacher's Exam and passed with flying colors. I felt I had hardly been away at all. I really wanted to go to the Seventh Grade but there was an opening in the Sixth and there I was sent. I immediately started on correspondence courses and summer courses at Charleston E.I.U. so as to get my degree as soon as possible. Now I was teaching some grandchildren of the ones I taught when I was 18 in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grades my first year of teaching but I was in a newer and better schoolhouse – Grade School on Louisville*

Road. And did I ever enjoy teaching again! Pleasant, my husband, had died when Quentin was a baby and Bud had pretty well taken over the ice, oil, and filling station business. So I really needed a job.

And what a job! Things were changing so and it was suggested I be principal when they needed one. Ruby Sullens wanted the job so she got it. I was content with my own room, most of the time fifth grade. We had so much fun. We wrote poems and made booklets of them. I always went by and got the daily paper at the post office so we could have current events first. We made paper mache' and put on small cans – let them dry and painted them in beautiful designs and colors. I still have several of those vases in my home today – somebody always wanting to do one for me. We painted the windows every holiday and sometimes in between. And made pictures on wide paper from the printing office and put in the hallways. I taught German and Latin and French as well as English. And we had Elizabeth Killie, who had lived years in Central America to come and teach us Spanish and I learned with the children. We practiced in between Elizabeth's visits to our school and made booklets of same to keep. I had known Elizabeth as a child. We made up programs and gave before the Assembly of all the Grades. Some of the other teachers thought I was foolish to work so hard, but I loved every minute of it. For twelve years I kept this up under several superintendents and principals. Keep in mind I instilled in the minds of my pupils we must get our book lessons first before we did any of this extra-curricular part. So they were so busy getting that done and around to the fun that I seldom had any discipline problems. Oh, I remember leaving a boy in his seat at recess when I had to go to the playground for duty. He jumped out the window. Later he became a preacher and still is so maybe I didn't spoil him too much. I've turned out commercial artists, and doctors and lawyers and farmers and teachers and lots of others. The last year I taught I told one of the younger teachers I was getting too old to teach. She replied that I was the youngest one there. I doubt that. When I turned 70 I resigned. The superintendent asked me to reconsider or at least to fill in as a substitute. I told him that would break my heart – when I quit I quit. And I did.

*For 2 years I stayed away from that school to get over it. I've been there since for programs, etc. but it's never the same when one isn't "in the thick of it." Fifteen years have gone by since that time but I often think of "those wonderful teaching days." Thank you, God, for letting me be a part of it so long!*

*What about the salary? From the \$455.00 for my entire first year of teaching I went to \$10,000 as I ended my career at 70 years. And it has gone up and up. I would be getting around \$30,000 now as does my daughter Helen. Quentin gets much more but he's a P.H.D. And they say teachers are underpaid! Perhaps. But I told them then and I still say today, "I'd teach for nothing because of my great love for the job."*

*That takes me to some of my "free" teaching. In my church work I had teenagers awhile. But my real love there was with Seniors: 65 to 98. They liked me because they could understand me – my foghorn voice. And then I taught young adults, including the school superintendent and teachers and so many more. It too was a real joy – all this in our Methodist Church in Kinmundy. Several of them knew much more than I did but we had a good time discussing it all together. And my "Bible Teaching" I had at E.I. and my long years of study every Wed. night with Ruby Linton (she's a superb teacher) paid big dividends at this time. My teaching has been the "Big Accomplishment" of my life. (Not counting my lovely family.)*



1922  
Glen Ellyn



Lura and her principal,  
Margaret Simmons,  
in Glen Ellyn, IL



1960  
Kimmundy Grade School