

SING A LITTLE, LEARN A LITTLE, LAUGH A LOT

What I Learned From My Students

Parents always wonder what goes on in their children's school, so early in my teaching career, which spanned ten years and four grades, I began keeping a diary of all the loveable antics and zany quips of my students.

I have not attempted to put my notes into a novel or even a chronological journal. The book is designed to be read a little at a time, at leisure. Since each incident is complete in itself, it is easy to stop at any point and begin again without losing the train of thought.

Because I taught in Kansas, the setting and aura of the school and its students reflect the life style of the small town and open country of rural United States. For some readers, it may be a nostalgic reminder of a gentler time in our society. For parents, it provides another glimpse into your child's world. For all, it will be a pleasant recollection of childhood. Most of all, it offers a chance to laugh.

1

Now and then a student comes along who epitomizes all the mischief, energy, wonder and genius of childhood, a real life Tom Sawyer or the American comic strip character of Dennis The Menace. Such a little boy was Dwayne. In fact my thoughts of him are so influenced by the similarities to Dennis The Menace, that I can't remember his real name. I think of him as Dennis, but I will call him Dwayne. He was in my kindergarten class.

His hair was platinum blond. His eyes were big and blue, and his grin was roguish. I could always count on him to brighten a hum-drum day or to frustrate one which was going too smoothly.

He never allowed himself to be out storied at Show and Tell Time. If the day's activities were impoverished of excitement, his imagination never was. The rule-of-thumb under which he operated was, "If you don't have an exciting tale....invent one!" This he did frequently, delightfully weaving fact and fancy in complete innocence.

One morning after taking attendance and noting that Billy Riggs was absent, I asked the children if anyone knew why Billy wasn't in school. No sooner had the question left my mouth than Dwayne's hand went up.

"Yes," he said with his blue eyes dancing. "When the bus stopped for Billy this morning, his mother said that Billy couldn't come to school today because he was stuck in his brother's tuba, and she couldn't get him out."

"Really?" I searched the other children's faces for some hint of denial. There was nothing! The whole affair didn't seem to have caught their attention at all, and no one was willing to either confirm or deny it.

Surely not! This had to be one of those tales! Still, it was so incredible that there could just be an element of truth in it. Yet his mind was very fertile. Did I dare ask the bus driver to verify such a story and let her think that I might believe it for even a second?

I had learned from the children to be clever and wily, as well as suspicious. So I went to the door and asked the bus driver only if Billy had been sick that morning.

The driver said she didn't know. Billy's mother just stuck her head out the door and motioned for the driver to go on. "Cold morning, Isn't it?" she asked.

"It's pretty hot in here," I said with a chuckle as she pulled away. Turning back to the class, I said, "Ok, kids, let's say the pledge." I wondered if Dwayne knew what a tuba was!



2

**Little Mary spilled the paint,
Everything is blue!
I think the teacher's going crazy
So would you!**

At Show And Tell Time, Mary had mentioned that they had two calves born on their farm last night. So I was not at all surprised when Dwayne stood up next and, with great excitement and as much glowing vocabulary as his five years would allow, told of the birth of a BLUE calf last night.

"What color did you say the calf was?" I knew better, why did I ask?

"Blue! A real cute one, too!"

" So are you!" I chuckled to myself.

Later that same day, I had occasion to speak to his mother on the phone. Laughingly, I told her of her son's latest whopper.

"Oh, this one is true. There really is a type of cow we call a Blue Cow because of its blue-gray color, and we did have one born last night!"

Win a few, lose a few!

3

That year young and pretty Sandy Miller was teaching third grade just down the hall from my Kindergarten room. Now it happened that the time we passed through the hall on our way to the gym for Physical Activities, was the time for Mrs. Miller's morning break. She was frequently sitting at a small desk in the hallway grading papers.

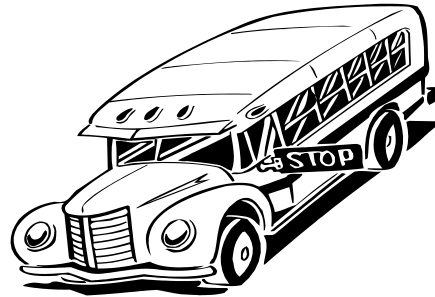
Every time we passed, in our little mother-hen-and-chicks line, Dwayne, looking the epitome of love and sincerity, would pull on Mrs. Miller's sleeve and say, "You're pretty!" Such a compliment would have turned the head of an angel!

On one such day, after school, Sandy could hardly wait to talk to me.

"Oh, my deflated ego!" she moaned. "You know that darling boy in your class, with the big blue eyes that would melt butter? Every time he sees me, he tells me I'm pretty. I've been eating

it up! Today when he got two feet past me, I heard him whisper to the next boy in line, " I say that to all the ladies, no matter what they look like!"

Tom Sawyer strikes again!



4

I had just finished reading Dr. Seuss' delightful book, GREEN EGGS AND HAM, to my attentive Kindergartners.

"I think I'll have green eggs and ham for breakfast tomorrow." quipped Dustin in his matter of fact, five-year -old, man-about-town-tone.

"You might have a hard time finding green eggs." I laughed.

"Oh no, we've got plenty of those."

"And where do you get these green eggs?"

"From our chickens, of course! I ought to know. It's my job to gather the eggs."

"Does your mom dye the eggs?"

"No, the chickens lay them that way."

"Well, someday you'll have to bring me one."

'Well, we don't get them every day."

I knew he was too precocious not to arrange for a way out of that one!

The next day Dustin shyly laid a package on my desk as the other children took off their sweaters and put their things away. He grinned up at me and slid a note into my hand without saying a word. I read the note from his mother.

"Dustin didn't think you believed that he had green eggs. He insisted on bringing these to you."

She went on to explain that she liked to try new breeds now and then, and had ordered some exotic Chinese pheasant hens. They did indeed lay green eggs!

I quickly opened the well wrapped box. There lay three lovely pale green eggs. They were the size of pullet eggs and the shells were sleek and shiny. I could see Dustin was delighted with my surprise.

"Sometimes Mom raises peacocks too," he grinned. We passed the eggs around the room and read Dr. Seuss' book again. Dustin was very satisfied the next morning when I announced to the class, that I had eaten the green eggs for breakfast and they were very delicious.



5

We always had a Show And Tell, or Sharing Time, in Kindergarten each morning. This was a time to allow the children to express themselves and share with their classmates.

Sometimes a child wanted to bring a pet for Show And Tell. So I encouraged the parents to arrange a convenient day. Bring the pet to school. Let the child share it with his classmates, and then take the pet home.

This worked very well, and over the years we had a variety of interesting pets. We had the usual array of cats, dogs, rabbits,

guinea pigs, hamsters, and guppies. Being a rural community, we sometimes also had some wild animal pets, such as raccoons and opossums.

One year a mother asked me if it would be alright to bring some piglets. I assured her we would be delighted. I was prepared for a rather messy' exhibition when the mother arrived. I was as delighted as the children, when from a small box she drew two chubby little pink charmers. Each one was decked with a big ribbon around his neck and smelled like a field of spring blossoms. The mother had bathed them in shampoo and sprayed them with perfume!

They were charming, and very well mannered. They loved to have their little sides rubbed, standing in quiet ecstasy with their eyes closed and what looked very much like a contented grin on their faces.

The little porkers were such a success that each of the three years I had a child from this family in my Kindergarten class, the mother repeated the interview for the new class. Each time the piglets came freshly bathed, and complete with ribbons and perfume.

6

During Sharing Time one day, a rough and tumble little rogue named Jason presented the class with a huge snake skin. It looked to me to be big enough to have come from the large pythons one sees in zoos. I guessed that he had probably received the skin from a zookeeper when the snakes had shed their skins.

"Where did you get that?" I asked.

"From my pet Boa-Constrictor," he answered, with a matter-of-fact innocence.

Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to invite the children to bring their pets after all. I was grateful that he had brought only the skin! I could see the report, if he had brought the snake ●●●●

Betty comes home from school in tears,
crying, "Jason's pet ate my pet!"

Well, as long as the parents brought the pets and took them home after their debut, I'd be fairly safe.



7

I decided to perk-up my third grade class in Language Arts that year by including a short unit on poetry. I thought we could study three or four simple forms of poetry and try our hand at writing a few. We might even try some choral reading of poetry if things went well.

I rallied an impressive set of aims and objectives which I hoped to accomplish in the unit. Among these was, that the children feel that poetry was fun. To accomplish this, I would introduce the limerick. I knew the children would take to this form like a duck takes to water. It was just the sort of thing to spark third-grade humor.

The school library was sparse in this area, so I went to the city library to check out a variety of books on poetry for children, and two books of limericks.

I went through the books and selected a few limericks which I would read to the class as examples, and to inspire their imagination and interest at trying to write a few of their own.

Everything was going well. They were laughing and enjoying the witty form so much that I became very enthusiastic myself. Then my eyes caught a limerick across the page from one I had chosen to read.

"Here's one that looks good!" I had a vague recollection that I was violating some rule of pedagogy about previewing anything presented to the class, but I went on.

" The Pellican

" What a wonderful bird is the pelican.

His beak can hold more than his belly can.

But I don't know how in the....."

My eyes read ahead, and I stopped abruptly, stammering. I turned the page quickly to one of the limericks I had previewed.

"Here's another funny one!" I read quickly, scanning the faces to see some sign of a snicker from some alert little mind. Nothing! I was lucky that time! I could just see my career going down the drain if some wily rascal had quoted that one at the supper table, for a parent shocker!



Any loud laughing coming from the boy's room in the Kindergarten classroom brought me running on-the-double. It was partly because one never knew what was going on, and partly because I had some good suspicions of what might be going on.

There was the yearly Urine Squirting Tournament, as I came to call it. Somehow almost every year, two or three brave little soldiers got into a squirting duel. With great delight and a lot of loud laughing and screeching, they maintained their smelly little fracas until the teacher came to break it up.

I can't, for the life of me, see what they saw in this messy affair, but I concluded it must be something in the nature of boys, because it, like the flight of the geese, seemed to be

a yearly urge.

The participants were always completely oblivious to the smell. Unfortunately, I was not! But the smell subsided considerably after they dried out in the breeze, or by standing in front of the heater.

I never found a satisfactory way to avoid this. If I restricted admission to only one boy at a time in the restroom, the after recess line became so long that I ended up calling the janitor to clean-up an accident. So I chalked it up to risks of the trade. After all, I knew the job was dangerous when I took it!

9

One morning I heard loud boisterous talking and laughing in the boys room.

"I really got him!"

"I squirted 'im good! Here 'e goes again! Get 'im!"

There was a series of screams and squeals. I knocked a warning and then entered.

Two Kindergarten boys looked up at me in innocent excitement.

"Teacher, Teacher, there's a spider in here!" He pointed at the latrine.

"We got 'im, Teacher, we got 'im!"

"There he is! You step on him, Teacher!"

The place was reeking! I looked past the urine covered floor and into the latrine. A very soggy and bedraggled long-legged spider was trying to pull himself out over the ledge.

They wanted me to stick my foot in that stuff!

Laughing I said, " That poor little spider has had enough!

Let's wash our hands and get ready for story time. I'll call the custodian to clean up. I think this is more than we can handle." They looked disappointed. The old party-pooper had spoiled the fun again! Just a few more squirts and they'd have finished him off.

10

Everyone agrees that no one suffers more in a divorce than the children of the couple involved. But few people see and feel this suffering the way the concerned teacher does.

Justin was a very bright third grader. But he was not performing well in school. Obviously, he had many problems, among which, I knew, was the fact that he greatly resented not having a father in the home.

The real depth of his need became clear to me when, in the middle of science class one afternoon, he burst into

uncontrollable crying. Now every teacher knows that the unwritten code of every boy past the second grade is ..."Big boys don't cry."

Realizing that only a very serious personal problem could incite such an outburst of emotion, I called the teacher's aid to my class, and invited Justin to the lunchroom so we could talk out the problem in private.

After many sobs and a long, rambling, and disconnected monologue, he poured out his anguish at not having a father at home, as the other boys did.

"You know my mother can't play football with me. She tries, I know she tries, and she's a good mother. But no one can be a mother and a father. A boy needs a father!"

Then he suddenly seemed to turn on his mother in anger. He related, in very animated communication, a tale of a salesman who had come to the house yesterday. Then he stopped abruptly and looked at me in silence, as though demanding an answer.

I didn't even know what the question was! I didn't know what to say. I could see no connection between this salesman who had innocently wandered into the home, and Justin's anguish over not having a father.

We sat staring at each other, when suddenly it dawned on me. Justin saw this salesman, and every man who had any contact with

his mother, as a potential father. She had let him get away!

I swallowed the lump in my throat. "Justin, you wouldn't want your mother to marry just anyone, would you?" I asked as gently as I could.

"No." He was thoughtful and swallowed hard.

"It would have to be a good man who loved you and your sister as well as your mother. You wouldn't want your mother to make a mistake. You must know that good fathers are hard to find. It is better to have no father, than to have a man who is not good for you and your family. You know your mother wants to do what is best for all of you, don't you?"

"Yes, Teacher, but if at first you don't succeed, try, try, again," he quoted in deep frustration.

"I am sure she will do what is best, but in the meantime, you must be brave, Justin."

His tear stained eyes met mine and he said, in a choked whisper, words that tore at my heart.

"I am brave, I am brave!" Then he wiped his face on his sleeve, stood up, and said, "I'm ready to go back to class now."

I was not at all sure that I was.

Johnny's locked in the bathroom.

Susie's eating glue.

Millicent is crying,

And Teacher is too.

It is not uncommon for Kindergarten children to nibble on the corners of their books, chew their pencils and erasers, sharpen their pencils with their teeth, and even taste samples of crayons and glue.

But Manda didn't just taste glue. She glugged it, like a drunkard his booze! When I took her glue bottle from her, I told her that I would spread the glue with her whenever we had a project that required it.

At the next project, I instructed the children to get their glue ready. Almost instantly I heard a loud commotion in the back of the room. Manda had grabbed her neighbor's full bottle of glue, screwed the cap off the bottle, and was draining it, post haste.

I tried moving her out of reach of glue bottles and closer to my watchful eyes.

Not only was glue a problem, but I had a growing phobia of

finding Manda's tongue lying on the floor.

Every time the children used their blunt scissors, Manda would sit with her scissors in her mouth, and her tongue between the open blades.

True, the scissors were not large or very sharp, but one good bump of the elbow, and I shuddered to think what would happen.

All of my teaching, scolding, and coaxing was not enough to break her of this habit, and I was forced to sit with her while she cut, to make sure she did not have a scissors in her hand when I was not there to guide her.

12

It always takes Kindergarten children plenty of time to put away their supplies and get ready to leave at the end of the school day. This afternoon we had been involved in a particularly messy project and it had taken them longer than expected to clean up. We were running late.

I finally managed to get them in a disorderly line and was leading them hurriedly down the long corridor to the waiting bus.

On the way down the hall I passed the music teacher who smiled and nodded a greeting. Then she suddenly grabbed my arm, and obviously stifling a loud laugh, she said, " You are not going to send Manda home like that are you?"

I looked down the long skewed line of bobbing heads. There, somewhere in the middle of the line, stood Manda. Her right hand was stretched in front of her, groping. Her left hand was being gently guided by a classmate.

She had completely covered the glass of her large horn rimmed eyeglasses with purple crayon, thickly applied, and looked like the proverbial blind beggar, haltingly feeling her way along

How do you remove crayon from glass in a hurry? With rubbing alcohol! How did I know that? Thank God for those little bits of information every mother tucks away in her mind, and also for the fact that we were no more than six feet from the school nurse's office, where I knew I could find a bottle of alcohol.

The color came off easily, and the bus was able to pull away only two or three minutes off schedule. A normal day!

13

I was seated on the floor with my Kindergarten class seated around me in a circle. We were sharing our thoughts on what was the most beautiful thing we had ever seen.

One little girl had a new baby sister whom her mother had just brought home from the hospital a few days before. She said she thought her little sister was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

I remembered my own worshipful admiration when I brought each of my own babies home for the first time. I almost became misty eyed. This mother must have really prepared her child for the birth of her sister.

Other children shared their aesthetic values. Then one quiet boy very shyly raised his hand.

"What's the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?" I asked. His voice was almost a whisper. "You are, Teacher," he beamed at me.

That is probably the most precious compliment I will ever receive. It was also the beginning of the understanding that above all other teachers, the Kindergarten teacher has a chance to be the most adored. Never again will a child's heart be so tender and his personality so open and innocent.

14

A teacher doesn't always feel loved and appreciated. There are probably always those times in every profession when a person feels unappreciated, unaccepted, rebuked, or rebuffed. Although children are more open and free to express their feelings than adults frequently are, they don't flood the teacher with adulation every day. But when unfeigned appreciation is

sincerely expressed, how sweet it is!

One other time I received the extreme compliment from a kindergartner. It had been a good morning and I was thoroughly enjoying the children. We were getting ready to go outdoors for recess when a boy took my hand and said, "You're fun!" That's all....simple! But, oh, what a difference it made in my day. What a pleasant memory it is even now.

15

It was January and the students were back from the Christmas Holidays. There were many signs of Christmas gifts as the children wore new clothes and shared books and toys.

The first grade girls were all late in coming back to class after recess. I went to the Girls Room to see what was keeping them. All the first grade girls were seated on the floor in a semicircle, passing around a bottle of cheap perfume, which had been received as a Christmas gift. Phew! The whole room reeked! Apparently everyone had poured on a liberal amount.

"It's time to get back to class." But I wasn't at all sure I really wanted them.

Interesting things go on in school restrooms. I recalled another day when I passed the door to the Girls Room and heard a boy's voice holler, "Susan, Susan! Are you there?"

I opened the door and there was a group of girls with their heads down near the floor and their ears pressed against the cold air vents. They were yelling messages back to the boys at the other end of the vent. It wasn't a bad communication system. It made an interesting diversion from a boring class.

There was also the incident of finding muddy footprints going up the wall in the Boy's Room. They went up the wall to the ceiling, across the ceiling, and down the adjoining wall. Who knows? I thought I could guess the culprit.

16

They say fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But the very young child rushes in and out again without ever realizing he's been there. There is a certain built-in danger in innocence. Every parent fears that their child may reveal family secrets.

In my enrollment speech to the new Kindergarten parents each year I always informed them that I would believe only half of what I heard happened at home, if they would believe only half of what they

heard happened at school.

On this particular day, we were discussing the role of the policeman in the life of the community. I asked, "what else does the policeman do for us?"

One little girl, who was new in the community, had been waiting impatiently to express her ideas on the subject. She burst forth in an enthusiastically high pitched voice, "They arrested my uncle for stealing cars!"

At a parent teacher conference I once greeted a mother by telling her that I was very happy to hear that there was going to be a new baby in their family.

"Oh," she said coolly, "No one is supposed to know that."

"Oh well, you won't be able to keep it a secret very long anyway," I said, trying to get the poor snitcher off the hook. She didn't seem too happy about that thought either, so I switched quickly to how Junior was doing in school.

If your child's Kindergarten class encourages a Show And Tell Time, or whatever other charming name they may choose to call it, your only defense as a parent, to keep it from becoming **True Confession Of The Family Time**, is to prepare your child with a rehearsed speech, and pray that it doesn't get embellished for special effects.

**Roses are red.
My stomach is queezy.
Who said that teaching
Was going to be easy!**

It was a very cold winter's day. Snow was still on the ground from days before. It was time for the morning kindergarten class to get ready to go home for the day. I was busy getting all the boots on, the jackets zipped, scarves tucked in, and hoods securely tied under chins.

Jack was having a very difficult time. His mother had attached his mittens to the back of his coat collar with a long cord, so that they would not be lost. Every time he tried to put his arm into a sleeve, he would find himself embroiled in the cord.

First it was twisted around his neck. He extracted himself from that. The next try ended with both mitten chords twisted around the same arm and the whole mess not being able to pass through the sleeve. He patiently unwound the chords again, and proceeded to make a third attempt.

I was busy helping someone else with their boots. When I

looked up again, Jack had somehow managed to get his coat on and was now struggling to buckle a pair of high black boots. Each boot had about twelve buckles. He was on the first, and not doing too well. The children who had gotten dressed first were getting hot and wiggly and we were already five minutes past departure time.

I finished my boot job and made my way to Jack's aid. I quickly buckled about six buckles on each boot and told him he could work on the others on the bus. I rose to a standing position and Jack let out a howl.

"Teacher!" he screamed, "I can't stand up! You buckled my mitten string into my boots!"

One angry eye peered up at me in exasperation. The other was covered by a stocking cap. He looked so helpless with his head and back all bent over, his arms flailing the air, and his little stocking cap covering his eye, that I just had to laugh. He laughed too. That made the whole unbuckling process easier for the both of us.

I was really in a hurry now. I broke two fingernails on the buckles. I gave each child a double check, since the temperature was below zero, and hurried them out the door.

As Jayne passed I noticed a long white knee-high stocking hanging out of her pocket. "Oh no, Jayne, what are you doing with

your stockings in your pocket?" I asked pulling her out of line, so the others could get on to the impatiently waiting bus driver.

She looked at me with a toothless grin. "Well, they' re not exactly my stockings," she said. "We couldn't find my mittens this morning so Mom told me to wear these on my hands."

18

It had been snowing for three days. By this time the snow was piled high and I had to be sure every child in my kindergarten class had their boots on and their coats and hats securely fastened before they went outdoors.

It was one of those years when every child had the same little red boots. There they were, all lined up in a row. There was no way of telling which boots belonged to whom, without reading the name attached to the inside of each one.

Fortunately, the children had learned to recognize their own names, but they still needed help in getting the boots over their shoes. Rubber sneakers were especially difficult to get into the boots.

I had already broken three fingernails and my back was aching from bending to struggle with twenty pairs of chubby little feet.

I had just gotten the last boot shoved snugly over the sneaker and was standing upright and stretching the kink from my aching back, when Mike looked up at me and said,

"Teacher these are not my boots."

Back to the floor I went and struggled to remove the misplaced boots as quickly as possible. I was already late and the bus driver was getting impatient. The last boot came off with one mighty tug. Mike smiled at me.

"They are my brother's boots, but Mom said I should wear them today because she can't find mine."

19

Jimmy was one of the skinniest little kindergarten boys I'd ever seen. His pants were always too wide for his tiny waist. The belt that held them up had been cut off and extra holes punched in it to make it tight enough to hold the pants up.

The material hung in loose folds in the front and made bulky ridges around the legs. Because of all the extra material wadded in the front of his pants, he always had a hard time zipping or unzipping the front fly. I always had to help him, and it wasn't an easy procedure for me either.

One day he had waited just a little too long and went running

into the Boy's Room in great haste, hands between his legs. In two seconds he was out again, feverishly rummaging in front of his baggy blue jeans. He wailed, " Teacher, I can't find it! I can't find it!"

I rushed him to the Boy's Room, where we both hunted feverishly. Eureka! Just in time! I jumped out of the way, but not too soon to see the relieved and grateful glance over his shoulder as I left the room.

20

One of the first activities the new class of kindergartners would do each year was to draw pictures of their entire family. Each family member was drawn on a different sheet of paper and then I put each child's drawings together in a booklet labeled, MY FAMILY.

The students drew one family member each day as we discussed their role in the family unit. At the end of the week I had a huge stack of drawings to take home over the weekend to sort and assemble.

The first few years my own children liked to help me with this little project. They would snicker at the oversized heads, and the arms sticking out of the head where the ears should be.

Most of all, they delighted in a game they invented called, COUNT THE BELLY BUTTONS. The object of the game was to see how many students had drawn belly buttons on their figures.

It never seemed to matter at all to the kindergartners that one would not be able to see this little anatomical detail on a fully dressed person. Instead, they seemed very eager to show that they knew every detail of anatomy. In fact, almost every year some boys were sure to add a penis to their drawings. Some even gave penises to their drawings of their mother and sisters.

But this time I was not dealing with a kindergartner. It was a playful and very precocious third grader. I always delighted in Dustin because there was a certain thrill in watching his agile mind attack a new situation, or tuck away some bit of information for future use. He had a wit about him which came from an alert and intelligent mind.

One day we were entering the room after being outdoors for recess. The children were hanging their sweaters, and I was whizzing down the aisle, in my predictable pattern, to hang my wrap in the front of my third grade classroom.

As I came down the aisle between the desks, I was startled by a barrage of flying pencils, erasers, and crayons. They came at me seemingly from nowhere. Instantly, I saw the string, and knew what had happened. The children were delighted, and almost hysterical with laughter. I was laughing too, because it really was

funny, and because, if you can't lick 'em, you might as well join 'em.

I didn't have to guess who was responsible. I had no doubt it was Dustin. It was really a simple trick, but its effect was glorious beyond its worth. The children had been storing their pencils, erasers, and crayons in brightly covered cans, which they kept on the corner of their desks. A string tied around the cans on adjoining desks and stretched across the aisle, was not very noticeable, and made a perfect teacher trap. The faster the victim was traveling at the time of impact, the more dramatic the effect. I was always the perfect straight man for Dustin's jokes.

This time, however, was to be the glorious exception. We had been studying a science unit called, MY BODY AND HOW IT WORKS, or some similar title. For this activity I had asked the children to work in pairs. Each child was given a large piece of butcher paper. They were to lie on the paper and their partner was to trace around their body. As we studied the various organs, etc., the children could then draw each one in its proper place in the outline of his own body. Of course partners were always of the same sex.

The project was going on nicely. Where the girls couldn't trace around dresses, they were stopping and letting the individual add additional lines on her own drawing. No problems!

I was walking around the room observing progress, when I

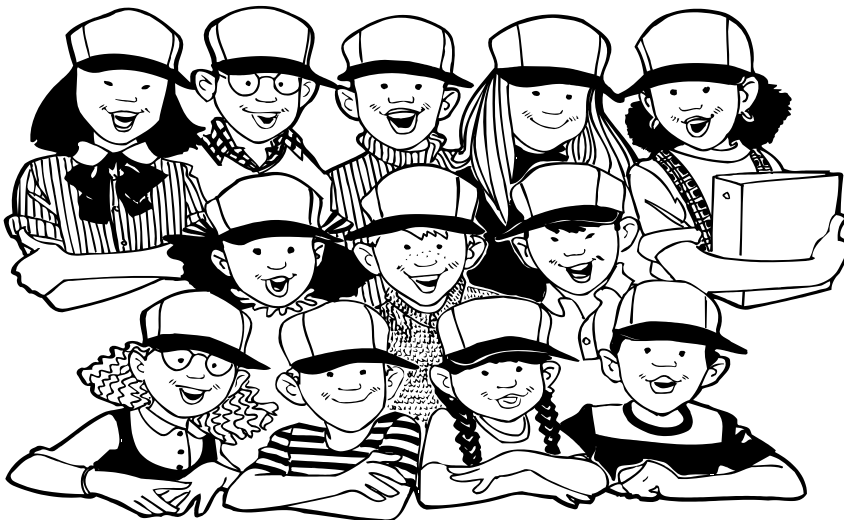
Came to Dustin and his partner. They were snickering. Dustin had his hand over part of his drawing. He could hardly wait to apply the shock treatment when I would ask him to remove his hand and allow me to see what he had drawn.

It took no imagination to guess what would greet my eyes. His eyes were twinkling and the mischief was fairly radiating from his face. His eyes were riveted on me. He did not want to miss one bit of delight over the expression on my face.

But this time, this glorious moment, I was in complete control! I smiled sweetly, and said, "That's very fine, Dustin. Put your name on it and I'll hang it up in the front of the class so they can all see it."

Out came the eraser, "Oh no you don't, no way!"

"Gotcha!" Ah sweet victory!



**Did he die of tuberculosis,
or perhaps it was diphtheria?
Oh no, my dear,
he died from eating
in the school cafeteria!**

The school cafeteria, or Lunch Room, is the brunt of many jokes and snide remarks. The children devise clever songs and chants which declare their disregard for the culinary concoctions which are served there.

Kristin was sitting at the lunch table with a full plate of food in front of her. She had not eaten one bite. She said she didn't feel well. The teacher sitting beside her asked, "Where don't you feel well?" She pointed to her meat and vegetable casserole.

In our school, the students could not receive a second serving of food until they had eaten everything on their plate. Their methods of coping with this dilemma were myriad and ingenious.

One could wrap an offensive vegetable in several napkins and slip it under the table. Or, if a student could find a classmate who liked some vegetable he or she regarded with disdain, that

friend could sometimes be cajoled or bribed to eat the stuff for them. Just a little surreptitious sleight of hand, while the teacher's attention was elsewhere, was all that was needed.

There were many ingenious ways to get rid of peas. Peas roll off plates and forks easily and, in the course of a meal, none needed to end up in the student's mouth, if he were careful.

For some reason, peas seemed to be regarded as the most insufferable of vegetables, and were the most maligned and abused of all. They made wonderful ammunition when loaded on the back of a fork and catapulted across the room. Some students honed their skills to martial perfection.

There was an unwritten law regarding the game of pea shooting. The cardinal rule of the game was that one never shot peas at a teacher, because if they found that a game was afoot, it was the demise of the amusement for some time to come.



Sometimes we see in children that which is very disturbing to us. Maybe it disturbs us because we fear that the feelings they reveal lie buried deep inside all of us, and we are afraid that sometimes we might not control these feeling much better than the child.

It was a lovely spring. The birds were busy building nests. The teachers and students alike were delighted and very excited when a meadow lark chose to favor us by building her nest on the school property, in front of the building, but not too close.

The teachers tried to keep the curious children from investigating the nest too closely, so as not to frighten the mother. They were encouraged to watch nature's miracle of birth, and the instincts of creatures to care for their young, from a safe distance.

The teachers were all pleased with the gentleness, the wonder and the awe, which the children expressed toward this performance of nature's yearly drama. We felt they were learning some things from their observation which no text book could teach them.

My own daughter was very interested in photography at the time, and had received a camera lense which would allow close-up shots. It was perfect for photographing natures little creatures

in action. I knew she would be thrilled to get a chance to photograph the lark's nest. I was sure that she could get some good shots of the little ones with their mouths open wide, in anticipation of their mother's arrival.

On Saturday morning we drove out to the little country school, with camera and lens. We approached the spot with soft slow footsteps.

"Where's the nest?" my daughter whispered.

"Go carefully, it's well camouflaged. It's right around here somewhere, I'm certain."

She had her camera set and ready. I was becoming concerned, because I knew we were standing on the spot where the nest should be. It was gone! A hawk, a dog, what had gotten the nest? At the same time, my daughters eyes caught sight of fragments of the nest scattered about.

"Something has gotten it!" Her voice sounded both angry and hurt.

"I fear it was some animal. We really can't blame them you know. That's the way it is with animals," I said.

I really didn't need to tell her this. She had read every animal book available in her school library and knew more about wild animals than I did.

She picked up a pointed stick which was lying near-by and

began to poke at the spot. "Look at all the ants!"

We both gasped as the ugly truth met our eyes. The mangled bodies of the tiny baby birds lay at our feet. They had been smashed, poked full of holes, and beaten into the ground. The work of a human!

My daughter threw the stick from her hand with disgust. "They must have used this very stick!" Her eyes flashed with anger. "Animals kill for food, but this "

Questions were running through my mind too. Only the children from our school knew the nest was there. It was too well hidden to be found by the casual observer, and few people ever came to the remote building after school hours. It had to be a child who knew the nest was there.

Why? What makes human beings act so cruelly? When children grow up, is it any wonder that we have crime and wars?

23

The big thing in education at the time was Sex Education. The educators felt it was necessary, since it obviously was not being adequately taught in the home. In support of their argument they rallied scores of statistics showing a phenomenal

rise in the number of unwed mothers among teenagers, and an alarming increase in teen age abortions. The solution to this social problem, they maintained, was education, of course.

Parent and church groups were reluctantly giving in to making sex education the responsibility of the schools, although they held serious doubts about whether this was the best answer to the social problem. The movement was still under attack and received a lot of attention from the news media.

In Kindergarten our problems were not so complicated, but I was still having a struggle finding solutions. We were working on learning to identify numerals, write them, be able to match the quantity with the numeral, and count correctly. We had gotten as far as the number six. For some reason the children were having much more difficulty with this number than they had with the others. I had tried every pedagogical approach, unorthodox approach, and improvisation I could think of. They still were not getting it.

In desperation I hit upon the idea of having a SIX DAY. I made a very big thing of it, and promoted it as a big surprise. I cut huge forms of the number six from heavy poster-board and hung them around the room. They dangled from every light fixture.

Large and small posters, with brightly colored sixes greeted the children's eyes everywhere they looked. I even stuck them on

the back of the bathroom commodes. I pinned large pieces of colored paper with lovely, clearly printed sixes to the shirt or blouse of each student.

For the coup de grace I wore a paper hat adorned, of course, with a large six. Around my neck I hung a big sign which contained the infamous number.

We were just getting into the spirit of SIX DAY, when the custodian came into the room to adjust something. She took a look around the room, and grinned.

"Oh, I see you're starting Six Education in kindergarten now!"

She could joke about it all she liked, but SIX DAY was a big success. Of course, a few still struggled to recall the name of that numeral, but they would eventually get it.

1

5

9

8

3

4

2

It was the beginning of the school year and all my kindergarten students were eagerly turning in their little pink cards, which showed that they had received an examination by their dentist and all necessary dental repairs had been made.

I had just been to my own family dentist the day before, and I was eager to share the good report with the children. I felt that it would encourage them in the proper care of their teeth.

That morning we had a short lesson on dental care, and sang a song the children had learned about brushing teeth. Now I started my pitch for regular dental check-ups. I enthusiastically told the children about the results of my dental check.

"The dentist told me that my record shows that I have not had a new cavity in ten years," I said proudly. "That's because I brush after every meal, and have regular dental check-ups."

A blond haired, blue eyed boy looked up at me. His eyes were wide with amazement. He piped, "Ten years! I haven't even been ALIVE ten years!"

25

I once made the mistake of jokingly telling kindergartners that I was about eighty years old when they asked about my age.

"Oh, she's not really eighty," some intelligent informer told the rest of the students.

"Well, how old do you think I am?" unfortunately, I asked.

Another voice from the class answered quickly, "Seventy nine!"

Not only is time a somewhat indefinite entity for a five year old, large numbers are also confusing.

Stan was eagerly showing me how well he could count. He had reached to one hundred and ninety nine. He hesitated for a long time.

"What number comes after one hundred and ninety nine?" I asked encouragingly.

With a burst of inspiration he replied, "One hundred and ninety ten!"

26

Teacher, Teacher, I've been thinking,

What in the world have you been drinking?

Was it beer? Was it wine?

Oh my goodness, it was turpentine!

Janet was my new student teacher. I had instructed her that for the first few days of training, she was just to observe and get acquainted with the children and the procedure. So, she was observing.

The kindergarten class was just getting started in the morning. I passed work papers to the children and came up just one short. Janet was watching to see what I would do in this emergency situation.

It was a simple worksheet which consisted of ruled lines which divided the paper into six boxes, in which the students were to draw pictures of things beginning with a certain letter sound.

I took a clean sheet of paper from my desk and quickly began to make a duplicate. The child without the worksheet fidgeted in his seat. I realized it would only be a second before he found something not too constructive to do with his time.

Two other children walked to the pencil sharpener. They turned the handle, and the base which holds the shavings, came off in their hands. Pencil shavings fell all over the floor. The children were not deterred, but worked industriously to turn the handle, with the loose container dangling from the base.

Janet was grinning. She had been told that she was simply to

watch and learn how the expert handled things. She made no attempt to help or interfere. She simply, obediently, observed.

"I'll be right there to help you," I comforted the two at the pencil sharpener, as I frantically hurried to complete the worksheet. I quickly ruled the paper. The lines were askew. I gave Billy the worksheet, then turned to help those at the pencil sharpener, and almost fell over two smiling students standing behind me. Each of them held a worksheet in their hand. They chanted, almost in unison, " You gave me an extra sheet." Back to the pencil sharpener! Janet was about to laugh. I could see her out of the corner of my eye.

The teacher's aid came in and told me I was two days behind in punching milk tickets. The most I could figure, I was one day behind.

I stamped the wrong paper with a Smiley Face. John looked at me with sympathy. "Silly, silly, Teacher!" He chided affectionately.

Janet was pretending to blow her nose, but I knew she was laughing behind her handkerchief.



Jill and I had to work together closely, since she taught first grade in the morning and I took over the class in the afternoon.

It was morning and I was in my kindergarten classroom. I heard a commotion in the hall. My student teacher happened to be teaching that morning, so I had time to slip out and see what was going on.

Jill was scurrying about in the hall with some wire and tools in her hands. I inquired as to what was happening.

"Oh, Richard handcuffed himself to his desk with David's toy handcuffs, and he couldn't get out. I thought at first the whole thing was going to be easy. I told David to get the keys and unlock them. David didn't bring the keys to school with him! Richard got a little frightened. He thought he was going to have to spend the rest of his life handcuffed to the desk. It's OK now. We jimmed the lock with a wire from a coat hanger, and released him. It took some doing, but it's over."

I laughed. It's always funny when it happens to someone else. Too bad it wasn't Sally. Then you could just relax all morning while she stayed in her seat for a change."

Sally was a little hyper-active girl that we enjoyed very

much, but she kept us on our toes. She was never in her chair and never doing what she was supposed to be doing.

Jill laughed too. "Don't tempt me! We're off to a great start!" Then her face lightened in an impish grin. "Just think, you get them this afternoon!"

28

A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.

It was the Christmas season and my mind was full of things I wanted to do, or things that had to be done. With all the planning for the holidays on my mind, I couldn't sleep. I had a miserable night, and woke the next morning feeling agitated.

I knew that in just an hour I would have to face a classroom full of eager kindergarten children. Worse, they would have to face me. I felt sorry for them!

I had been planning all the Christmas projects we would do that week in school. My mind was filled with things I needed to prepare for this morning's activities. This morning we were going to cut reindeers from construction paper and tape twigs to the back of the heads for antlers.

Without warning, or previous conversation, I looked up from my toast and said to my daughter, "I have to gather antlers before I go to school this morning."

There was a short pause, and then she said, with feigned gruffness in her voice, "Sure you do, Lady!" Laughingly she added, "You're working on a school project, uh?"

Realizing how ludicrous my statement had been, I laughed heartily. My daughter joined me. The humor of that moment changed my mood and set a new tone to the whole day.

I could not find any twigs around my yard which I felt were the right size or shape to use for my project. Instead I quickly gathered a pretty bunch of mums for my desk. It was unusual to have mums blooming in December, but we had been having mild weather, and I thought I would let the class enjoy them while they lasted.

On the way to school I met a yellow car. As it approached, I reached up to scratch my nose. The driver in the oncoming car saw the motion and thought I was waving at him. Thinking I must be someone he knew, he broke into a quick smile and waved enthusiastically.

I started to giggle when I thought of him spending the rest of the morning trying to figure out who I was. Then, thinking how ridiculous it looked for a grown woman to be driving down

the street giggling like a school girl, I burst into outright laughter. I thought children acted silly, and look at me!

After all, adults are only grown-up children. Why should we lose our precious sense of humor? I was glad that mine was in good health. I would need it.

As I turned down the little road that led to the school, I noticed all the hedge trees growing along the road. They would make a good source for antlers. I remembered that there was such a tree across the road from the school parking lot. I parked the car, grabbed a paper sack from the back seat of the car, and started pulling twigs from the scrawny tree.

As the other teachers arrived, they just gave knowing smiles and waves and went on their way into the building. Sue, the school custodian, came out to hoist the flags. She saw me and hollered across the road, "This is the wrong season to be pruning the local trees!"

"I'm just gathering antlers!"

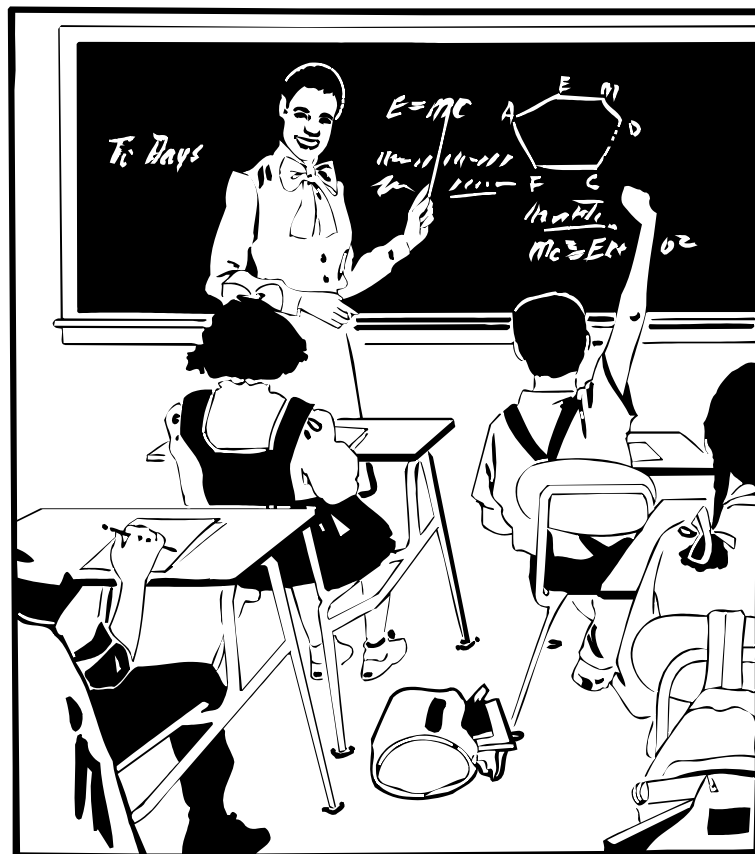
"Oh, I knew there must be some logical explanation!"

As I worked on the gnarled old hedge tree, I noticed a tiny dried-up hedge toad impaled on one of the branches. The work of a Shrike, no doubt. These birds frequently tack their victims to a thorn or twig to hold it in place, or store it for a later snack. This one never came back for his prey.

As the children arrived I was counting twigs to see if I had gathered enough. Finding that I was short several twigs, I put my coat on and left the class with Janet, my student teacher.

When I returned they were in the midst of Sharing Time. Janet was holding a bird feather above her head so that all the other students could see it.

"Do you know what kind of a feather that is?" Janet was asking. Lighthearted voices answered in chorus, "A bird feather!" We were off to a great start! It would be a good day.



It was spring and it was a great delight to both teachers and students to be able to really enjoy going outdoors for recess again, after a long winter.

Kansas is a windy place in every season, but in the spring it is especially so. Kansas springs are notorious as a time for tornadoes and high winds. So it was surprising to no one that this day was pleasantly warm, but very windy. The children were wearing only light sweaters and some were complaining about having to wear that much.

Brian came to school that morning wearing a brand new cowboy hat. He was very proud of it. Although he was only in kindergarten he was already riding horses and learning the art of rodeo skills. He was good at it too.

When recess time came I suggested to Brian that since it was so windy, it might not be wise to wear his new hat out on the playground. I assured him that his hat was very grand, but with its wide brim, I was sure the wind would whip it away quickly. He would have nothing to do with my suggestion, and insisted on wearing the hat.

It was lovely outdoors. The playground was covered with purple, yellow, and white flowers. The cattle were peacefully grazing on the other side of the barbed wire fence which enclosed

the school playground area.

Mr. Jones was the farmer who owned the fields adjoining the school. He had just purchased a new black Angus bull who would improve his stock. It was a wonderful and fearful animal to behold. Its strong muscles rippled under its shining black hide. His powerful head and threatening horns held a warning for any intruder into his domain. He was grazing in the field near the fence. It was obvious that he did not like the noisy intrusion of the children in such close proximity.

Just as I had predicted, Brian's hat kept blowing off his head and he gave it merry chase, over and over again. Of course the wind was blowing in the direction of the fence, and the bull. Brian seemed to be prone to run in that area of the playground.

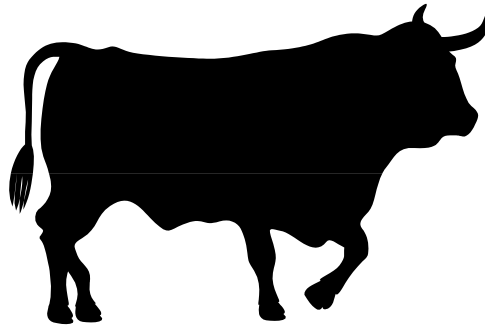
Several times the hat was stopped in its wild flight by the wire fence. This time it was hanging, with its main balance on the bull's side of the fence, hooked on one of the barbs in the wire. Brian had ignored all my suggestions to take the hat indoors, but this was too much!

"If that hat goes over the fence, you are not going to go in there with that bull, and get it, and I certainly will not!" I tried to make the situation as clear as possible!

He looked at the bull, who met his gaze with a fiery stare from his cold black eyes, and snorted at him with nostrils

dilating. Then he grinned at me and, taking his precious hat from his head, he ran toward the school building.

One bull is worth a thousand words!!



30

Hill Crest had an ideal location for science classes. Being out in the country we were completely surrounded by nature's own science laboratory.

In the spring we watched the crawdads perform amazing engineering feats in building their homes and tunnels in the ditches by the roadside. What wonderful tools nature had provided them with! What better way is there to spend a thirty minute science lesson?

One year robins built a nest in the eve spout. If we stood in just the right spot by the window in the Kindergarten room, we

could watch them feeding their young.

The next year there was a long period of muddy weather when we could not use the playground. During that period a cottontail rabbit built her nest just under the windows of the first grade room. By the first sunny day, when the children could again be outdoors, the baby rabbits were old enough to be hopping about. The delighted children quickly discovered the nest, and the teachers had quite a time keeping them from getting too close, and handling the babies.

The next day the mother had already moved her young elsewhere. The children carefully examined the nest and the blanket of grass and fur which covered it, keeping it secret and warm.

During the warm weather the children were always finding land turtles on the school grounds, and bringing them indoors for closer examination. There was one old turtle that kept turning up year after year. We named him, Jake. It was easy enough to identify Jake. He had a large scar on his back where his shell had been cracked and, through the wonderful healing powers of living things, had mended itself.

In spring or fall when the days were not hot and the children were tired of sitting at their desks, we would go for science walks. Usually we walked down the road to the creek. There were

always plenty of wild flowers and birds to identify, and stones to collect. The children loved to hunt for pretty stones along the road. The older classes tried to identify some of the various types of rock. The younger children just liked to collect them because they were pretty.

Young learners were sure to bring myriads of frog eggs, tadpoles, and baby crayfish each spring. These abounded on the farm ponds. We studied them carefully and encouraged the children to return them to the ponds.

One year we managed to keep some tadpoles until they turned into frogs. We eagerly awaited each new step in the metamorphosis with great wonder.

I delighted the whole school with a display of unabashed enthusiasm, when I ran up and down the halls, excitedly yelling, "My babies have been born!" and inviting them to see the very first batch of tadpoles I had ever managed to keep until they developed into frogs.

That same day, I was still euphoric when the principal came to visit my kindergarten class. "You should know that I'm teaching Sex Education," I announced triumphantly. I was hoping to jar his composure a little with that announcement. After all, that was a fairly controversial subject at that time, especially for kindergarten.

He hesitated just a moment and then said, in a most serious tone, "I guess that's alright, if you don't get a lot of trouble from the parents about it."

I was so chagrined that I don't remember whether I told him that my sex education lesson consisted only of watching tadpoles develop, and occasionally watching a pregnant guppy deliver a batch of babies who were no larger than the periods on a printed page. I never did know whether he had been serious, or just had the insight to realize that I was trying to shake his tranquility a bit.

31

"Teacher, Teacher, there's a snake under the teeter-totter!" There were about five kindergarten children jumping up and down excitedly and all talking at the same time. They pointed in the direction of the teeter-totter.

I didn't know much about snakes, but I did know that there were rattle snakes in this part of the country. The farmer who owned the property adjoining the playground had been harvesting his fields the last few days. It was very likely that the snakes would be driven out of the fields by the heavy equipment, and seek shelter in the adjoining playground area.

I quickly signaled for the children to line-up away from the play equipment. A quick check showed that no one had been bitten. With the children at a safe distance, I cautiously approached the teeter-totter.

I came as close as I dared to the clump of tall grass around the base of it. That is where the children had reported the snake to be hiding. I fully expected to have to get much closer before I could discover a small grass snake. But fear ran its icy finger up and down my spine as, even at this distance, I could see the coiled body of a large snake. It was brown and black and its body was about five inches in circumference.

From what little I knew about snake markings, this looked like a rattlesnake. With all the noise from the children, I was not sure I could hear a warning rattle, if the snake were giving one.

The school janitor was quickly summoned. He came running from the building carrying a large metal pole. As a city bred woman, I was afraid of snakes, but as a teacher, I knew that they filled an important role in the balance of nature, and that most of them were harmless.

I wish that Mr. Greer had waited until the snake could be properly identified, but he killed it immediately. Whether he felt that with the children around, he couldn't take chances, or

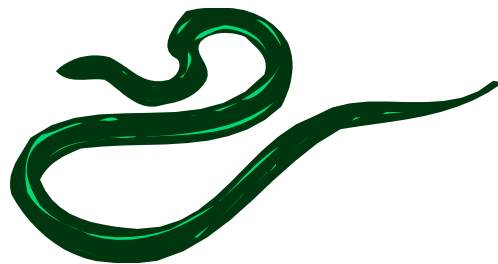
whether he just didn't like snakes, I'm not sure.

As soon as we could get a safe look at it, it proved to be a large bull snake, a very useful and harmless variety of snake.

I was sorry to have had any part in the destruction of such a useful and endangered creature. But I was congratulating myself for having remained cool, calm, and collected, and handling the situation with dispatch.

Then I noticed that my hands had suddenly become cold and clammy, my legs felt weak, and there was a knot in my stomach. The effects of emergency adrenalin were taking over. I kept asking myself, "What if that had been a rattle snake, and one of the children had been bitten?" We were at least twenty minutes from the nearest hospital or emergency medical facility.

One can never answer the question, "What if?" but at least the incident served to make me aware of the possible danger all the subsequent years I taught at Hill Crest.



A law forcing all motorcyclists to wear protective helmets while in motion had been recently passed. The cyclists were resisting it by demonstrations of protest, and by legal suits which claimed the law violated their freedoms.

I had just been informed of the death of the son of a friend. The accident involved his motorcycle and a truck. The cyclist clearly had no chance for survival.

I went to work that morning thinking of the bereavement of my friend, and feeling very much against motorcycles because of it. In the middle of the morning Mr. Stanley, the principal of the school, came to make his usual check on our rural facility. His office was in town at the high school, and he visited the remote elementary branch of his charge only twice a week.

The children were having their morning milk, and I was enjoying a cup of coffee in the interim. So we had time to chat for a few minutes.

I began to wax eloquent in my opinion of the dangers of motorcycles on the road. I ended my speech by saying that I hope my son never asked to own a motorcycle.

"Oh, I don't know," Mr. Stanley began, with a wry grin. "Both

of my sons have been driving motorcycles for some time, and have never had an accident. Driving cars is dangerous too. You just have to be careful."

Having given me his sage opinion, he left the room. I gathered the children together to take them down the hall to their music class. I was just passing the main door when I heard a loud engine noise. I looked out the window just in time to see Mr. Stanley plunk his helmet over his head, and take off....on his motorcycle.

Why hadn't someone told me he rode a motorcycle?!

33

The school bus is an amazing phenomenon on wheels. I never had the experience of riding one in all my years of attendance at the public schools in the megapolis in which I grew up. We either walked to school, or paid to ride on the public transportation system.

It was not until I began teaching, that I shared this experience of millions of Americans who have nostalgic memories of what they lovingly refer to as, the **Wacky-Wagon**.

As a teacher I have ridden the school bus many times and for many miles. Two things are sure to impress, if not overwhelm,

the rider. One is the unceasing, ear splitting, nerve wracking, din. The other is the rocking, jarring, and bumping, which is apt to have the effect of causing a phenomenon akin to sea sickness.

It is my opinion that every school bus driver deserves some sort of medal for bravery and endurance. Anything short of the threat of corporal punishment is bound to be ignored by the riders, even if the driver manages to make himself heard. Yet these unsung heroes usually manage to keep, not only their own sanity, but an admirable measure of control over the students.

We were getting ready for a field trip involving all the lower elementary grades from kindergarten through fourth grade. The principal said that although the trip had been planned for weeks, if the high school football team won their last game on Saturday, they would then go to play in the State Championship game on the very day our field trip was scheduled.

All the busses would have to be used to transport the team. This meant that if our team won the game Saturday, our field trip would be cancelled. I ordinarily don't care much for football, but this time, I not only cheered for them, I prayed that they would win. They lost!

It was a typical trip. Two lunch bags tore out at the bottom. Oranges, apples, candy bars, and two cans of pop came

rolling down the aisle under the seats. Then I saw the sack being passed from child to child down the aisle, until it reached me.

It was a soggy mess. On investigation, I discovered that the pull tab on the pop can had been dislodged and the carbonated beverage was spewing forth, as from a tiny geyser.

I didn't know what to do. It looked as though it would blow its top at any moment. I sat there jarring up and down on the bus, every jog agitating the carbon in the can. Sweet sticky pop was running down my arm, and thirty pairs of anxious eyes were looking at me with a, Teacher-will-know-what-to-do, expression.

Someone came up with a plastic bag into which we dropped the leaking pop can, one very soggy sandwich, and the wet paper bag. We managed to save an orange and a candy bar. The plastic bag and its booty were deposited in a box beside the bus driver, and I began to pray that the pop can would not explode. I was all sticky and smelled of orange soda.

Two minutes later a girl in the back seat spilled a bottle of awful smelling cheap perfume. Everyone started to feel sick. Chris was asking for his motion sickness pills. I was thinking that if we hit one more bump like that last one, I was going to upchuck.

On the way back everyone was tired. Five kindergartners fell asleep, one of them, in my lap. You wouldn't believe that

people could sleep in such contorted positions! I feared that some sleeper would fall from the seat into the isle, but on this trip, I don't think they did. It was amazing, but opinion polls taken after such trips always showed the same results...It was fun!

34

I had so many things on my mind, so many things to do and to get ready for Christmas at home and at school, that I felt stressful as I drove to work. When I turned onto the familiar gravel road that led to the school, the sun was shining on the stubble field in neat rows of golden red. It bathed everything in an amber glow. From the hill I could see the fields, the meadow, the golf course, and the ponds. Near the road the white faced cattle were peacefully grazing.

I forgot all my hurry and worry as I thought of the many happy years I'd come up over the hill, down the quiet road, and stopped on the bridge to listen to the creek gurgle over the rocks. It always made me feel all peaceful inside. My thoughts went back to the story of the first Christmas when sheep instead of cattle grazed, and a message of peace and love was brought to the world.

Many times when I stopped on that narrow bridge, with the quietness of the woods all around, to watch the snow silently

falling and marvel at its beauty, the words of Robert Frost's lovely poem would inspire me to reluctantly drive on.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

35

It was not uncommon for me to sight deer or coyotes on my way to and from school. Sometimes they would run across the road in a daring display of grace and speed. It is a beautiful sight to see deer leap a fence.

A frequent sight in early morning, and one of my favorites, was a mother Bobwhite crossing the road with her six or eight tiny chicks following like a row of periods behind her. During the day when the school windows were open, we could hear her sporadic "Bob-White" calls. They blended with the happy warble of the many meadow larks in the surrounding fields.

Whenever I woke in the morning feeling irritable and out of sorts with the world, by the time I had driven down that quiet

country road, I felt again in tune with myself and with nature.
There was never a greater therapy for my spirit, and the familiar
old road never lost its charm.

I could have applied to teach in town and avoided the longer
drive each day, but who would have wanted to?

36

STUDENT QUIPS AND QUOTES, FROM MY NOTES

Chrissy to Santa - "You remember me, I was at that store!"

* * * * *

Librarian - "What did the rooster look like?"

Kindergarten children answer in chorus - "A chicken!"

* * * * *

Teacher - "Are your brother and sister both younger than you are?"

Kindergartner - "No, they're littler."

* * * * *

Eric's paper read - "A nickel has five sins."

* * * * *

Kindergartner - "My brother is going to be communed on Sunday."

* * * * *

Teacher, to console a student, "That's OK we all make mistakes."

Chrissy, in the next seat, pipes up, "Not me!"

* * * * *

Chrissy wanted to know if she could have a notebook re-enforcement for her paper Halloween bat's "Tummy button" as well as his eyes.

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Child giving daily weather report - "It's a nice rainy day."

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A pupil's letter to the student teacher opened with the salutation, "Dear Mess Sherman,"

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One of the favorite antics of the kids was to throw the ball over the fence just as the bell rang. Then they had to retrieve it before they could come back into the building. This stall was good for at least three to five extra minutes on the playground.

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I had just put a piece of clear plastic tape on the torn page of a Kindergartner's workbook when I felt a tug at my skirt, and heard Dale's voice asking, "Teacher, will you please put some tape on my bottom?" The bottom flap of his crayon box was torn off.

The End