

Lessons from a One-Room School

by

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Once upon a time... if we could just go back in time to “once upon a time” in the one-room school. As a retired kindergarten teacher in the Mifflinburg School District, I still reflect back to my first grade experience in the one-room school at Buffalo Crossroads – perhaps the most memorable of my educational experiences. The red-brick school house had one teacher who taught the 3Rs to students in eight grades. Each day began with a Bible reading, prayer, and the Pledge of Allegiance. Pictures of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln were hanging at the front of the room, and we celebrated each birthday on their day, not Presidents’ Weekend.



Buffalo Crossroads School

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I have many memories of the classroom. I remember opening the big white wooden door of the school and looking inside, I saw the double-seated wooden desks with ink wells. In the back left corner of the room was the white ceramic water jug, which had blue stripes around it. It also had a push button spigot. In the back right corner of the room was the pot-bellied stove with a metal shield around it. The recitation bench was in the front and to the right of

Mr. Danowsky's desk. I remember that Mr. Danowsky had a bag of candy and if we recited our sight words correctly, we could reach into the bag for a piece of candy. The piano was to the left of the teacher's desk. On both sides of the walls were boards with hooks. Here we hung our coats and lunch pails. The chalk board covered the front of the room and had a chalk tray below. The lights, with white globes, hung from the ceiling on rods. I think there were three lights on each side of the room. AND, I remember the smelly, oily, wooden floor.

We sat with a friend, usually a student in a different grade, who was a built-in tutor. It was a community classroom of helping, caring and showing respect for one another. Discipline was taught with a paddle and we learned to follow and respect rules.

We used the outside toilet, and if we had the urge we would indicate by raising one finger or two fingers. We walked or rode our bicycles and many times, Tippie, our little terrier would follow us. Mr. Danowsky, our teacher, would allow Tippie to come in and sit with us until dismissal.

We each had a lunch pail with a folding metal cup. The water jug was in the back corner and the older boys were responsible for filling it. When on water detail, they would use a notched broomstick with a pail and carry the water from a hand pumped well at the neighbor's house. The rule of thumb: pump the water 15 to 20 times to remove rust before filling the pail!

Even though I have my own fond memories of the one-room school, I many times recall the memories as told by my mother, Dorothy Criswell Johnson, who taught at Sunrise and Robbins in the 1930s. As her first teaching assignment she had students in all eight grades, ranging from ages 4 to 19. Teachers at that time not only taught, but were also responsible for being the janitor, managing the pot-bellied stove, caring for those who became injured or ill, and listening to in-school social problems – one might say they had to be a jack-of-all-trades.

Mother often recalled "lock out day" or "doughnut day." Her students went out for recess, and would not come in until Mother would give them doughnuts – but certainly not doughnuts from Mr. Doughnut. So mother cut out paper doughnuts, sprinkled them with chalk dust, and put them in a puffed-up paper bag. She then opened the door and handed it to her students. They

exclaimed “these are paper doughnuts.” Mother told them that she saw them chew on paper wads, so they could chew on these. When she rang her hand bell the students came in.

Snow days were unheard of. Mother recalled wading through hip-deep snowdrifts. Upon arriving at school she was exhausted and had to rest before firing up the pot-bellied stove to warm the room before her students arrived.

And so time moves on and so does education. True, technology was not part of the one-room school, but education taught in a one-room school will never be duplicated by modern technology. It was a “once upon a time” experiences that will never be forgotten.

