

A Peek into the past - THE BEST SCHOOL BOARD IN OTTAWA COUNTY

The time was in the late 1940s. Bursley School was a two room school, and I am the teacher of record* for the 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th grades.

The Board comprised of three gentlemen. Robert Andres was the president.

Bursley was in desperate need of a teacher for the upper grades. The Board was aware that I had no teaching experience and was a product of the New York City school system. I obtained temporary certification from the State of Michigan.

The size of my combined group was 29. The Board instructed me to open every class with prayer, and the Salute to the Flag . They assured me that I could consult with them if I needed assistance in managing the class.

At this point I cannot tell how many there were in each grade, but my memory says there were more males than females in that group of 29. And, indeed, there are some outstanding memories of certain personalities – Ken and Don (brothers - 8th and 7th graders); Tom P - 8th grade; David S - 7th grade; Norman T - 7th grade; Ed L - 6th grade; and Darlene and Virginia - 7th and 8th graders).

There are stories for each but my favorite is the David S. one. His 'mouthiness' was persistent and finally I told him and the class that I had had ENOUGH. I asked Ken and Don to place him face down across my desk. I paddled him with my clip-board. He arose, rubbing his back side sayng “that ain't no love pat”. My clip board had split in half. The following day, Dave quietly presented me with a brand new one

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which had been beautifully handcrafted with a slab of wood with twice the thickness. Dave said, “my father wanted me to give you this”. The Board knew about this but did not reprove me in my handling of the incident.

When the Board did become aware of anything awry I'll always remember their tact in addressing it. For example, as an innovative discipline approach I suggested to the 29 kids that we have a Council to decide appropriate punishment – explaining the election process, establishing what the rules were to be, criteria for judging, etc.etc. The kids loved it – parents did not. Within a few days the Board came to my home (in Holland) and kindly told me that my idea may teach Democracy-in-action but parents were complaining because “we don't need other people's kids having the say-so about how our kids should be punished”. Of course, the Council was 'abolished'.

The Board members had me at their respective homes for dinner. I was so grateful when they told me I was “liked”.

The Board became aware that I had a painful personal problem – they allowed me time off to take care of it.

The Board suggested that to get rid of the “barn smell” in my classroom that I tell the Class NO|T to wear their barn clothes to school. I had been fearful of offending the families -- (never had to think about anything like this when going to school in NYC).

And, finally, after I had signed a Contract with Bursley for the coming year, they allowed me to withdraw for a more lucrative opportunity – not teaching – as they were aware of how very much I needed a larger income.

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I shall never forget this BOARD – the best school Board in Ottawa County!!!!

* The record will show Agnes G----- -

Footnote: I have such very fond memories of those 29 kids and it would be the thrill of a lifetime to meet up with any one of them. It is on my Bucket List!