

My First Year of Teaching

Gerry Biram

1944 was a momentous year in my life. It was the year that I left the protective shelter of my parent's home and began life on my own. I graduated magna cum laude from the University of Wyoming in mid-June and in late August went to my teaching position in Superior, a little mining town in western Wyoming.

My parents had done all they could to prepare me for this first assignment in my career. They had even provided me with a suitcase and a trunk to hold my belongings. They took me to board a train one morning three days before the school term began. I will never forget that trip on the cinder filled, dirty smoke-belching locomotive that took me across the state. I spent half of my time worrying about whether the baggage man would remember to unload my luggage in Rock Springs and the other half trying to keep clean. Cinders were piled inch deep on the floor and the window sills loaded with soot. Even the uncomfortable wicker covered seats were grey with ingrained dirt. I was riding what they called the "milk train" which was a local that stopped at every little town and hamlet and even deferring track space to freight trains carrying priority military goods. Because most passengers went short distances, no attempt was made to keep it clean or even very comfortable for any one on it.

How relieved I was when I stepped off the train in Rock Springs and found that my suitcases were actually there! The last eighteen miles were made by bus. In less than an hour we were on our way through the brown, treeless, grassless hills to that little mining town. The bus halted at the Union Pacific store. From there in every direction were the hills into which mine shafts had been drilled and on the slopes of which were the houses that housed the workers.

I was directed to the hill upon the top of which was the teacherage which was to be my home for the next nine months. It was straight up the highest hill in town as the crow flies. By foot, it was about a mile on a gravel road. I had to carry my small suitcase and I set out with more than a little misgiving about this whole experience. My large luggage would be delivered the next morning.

That teacherage was something else. To one who had grown up on a ranch with four people in a house, had never lived in a dormitory at college and was used to having my own room, it was a real shocker! Fifteen people lived there. Upstairs was a large central room complete with a huge stove that provided the only heat. Three bedrooms opened off of it. Two rooms held two double beds which were shared by four teachers. One smaller room housed only two persons. There was only one small closet in the room I was to use. My bedmate I had known at college and the others were also classmates. We had two dressers in our room. So little space! I quickly became friends with a girl from Almyra, New York who lived in the middle room and taught in high school. We are still keeping track of each other.

Downstairs lived a single principal of one grade school and her room mate. The caretaker and his wife who cooked had a room. A lady from Chicago had a little single room. There was big

living room, a huge dining area and one bathroom shared by us all. Needless to say we had to learn to budget use of this one room carefully and to accept the crowded conditions as best we could.

Not all the teachers were in this place. Married personnel lived in rented houses and several single people rented rooms and just ate meals with us.

From our high location we could see all over town. I taught at "B-Hill" school which was a long walk down our hill and up another. The high school was also near by. South City grade school was below our hill on a flat part of town. We could see box car village in which many many workers lived in box cars that had been converted to two room abodes for mine workers.

I liked that first year of work but I am sure that I did not do the best job of teaching possible. I was too new. I had second graders and for the most part, they succeeded well. But one year was enough. I secured a job through an agency for the year of 1945-1946 in Yakima, Washington and went back to being alone in a rented room.

I've been back to that place several times since to see friends. The mines are closed now. Box car town is gone. Many of the better houses were moved away. It is a bedroom community for Rock Springs. The last I heard, there was still a grade school open and others were bussed to the nearby larger town.