

## The Not So Golden Years

*By Hap Hansen*

In most areas of the country, the one-room schoolhouse is no more. It now only exists in the memories of those who attended one. A single teacher. Usually female. A half dozen or more first through eighth grade students. There was no Kindergarten in those days. Some of us call those school days of long ago a simpler time, some, the good ol' days, some the golden years. Do I want to go back and relive that era? Absolutely not! Here's why:

I got an occasional ruler slapped on the knuckles. Outdoor toilets. In total, not the best remembering experience. The Golden Years? Interestingly enough, they were called one-room schoolhouses, but they really weren't. Most had two rooms. The only door opened into a small, narrow ante room or cloak room. At one end of this room was the bin full of coal with which to stoke the potbellied stove located in the middle of the other, larger room. The big room was the classroom. The teacher was situated at her desk on a platform at one end and the desks for all grades were right in front of her. She never missed a thing. Every teacher I ever knew had eyes in the back of her head and could calculate the angle of a thrown spitball with ease. The guilty party then had to sit on a stool by her desk. No, we didn't have a pointed 'dunce cap,' but every student knew what the dunce stool was. Not particularly golden! Sometimes, when it was below zero in the winter, the pot-bellied stove would turn cherry red because of an overload of burning coal. In order to get the coal fire started, we used corn cobs brought from the various farms in the vicinity. But that stove-top kept jars of home-made soup piping hot so the students had a hot meal at lunch time. Recess was always looked forward to with anticipation. Games of various sorts would be completed in that 15-minute period. Races, basketball, softball, fox and geese, miniature war games, king of the hill and chasing the girls filled that all too brief time. Our rest rooms, called 'out-houses' in those days, were the two-hole kind and they all came equipped with last year's Sears Roebuck or Montgomery-Wards catalogue. I never figured out why they had two holes, because I had never seen more than one person in an out-house at any one time! I also remember the heavy winter snows and the muddy springs, when the 'big kids' had to carry the little ones to and from the out-house. Cold. Was it ever cold. And it seemed there was always frost to be scraped off the hole. No one wanted to bare their bottoms to sit on that frosty hole! As a result, though, not much time was wasted by students going to the necessary facilities!

Golden Years? Times change rapidly. And probably not many will remember the words to that nostalgic song, "School days, school days, good old Golden Rule Days. Reading and writing and 'Rithmetic, taught to the tune of a hickory stick!" Ah. The Golden Years?