First Impressions

*By Marilynn Reeves*

Both my mom and dad were intelligent but not what I would describe as ‘sophisticated.’ Dad would quote Shakespeare from time to time, however. And having been an Elementary School teacher back before I was born, our mother would read to us. Stories like *Little Red Robin* *Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk,* and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. I was also well versed in nursery rhymes. I could hardly wait to go to First Grade so I could learn to read them for myself!

Salida had three Elementary Schools for Grades 1-6: Longfellow, which sat at the foot of the Mesa; the Parochial school for children brought up in the Catholic persuasion; and McCray, which was just a couple of blocks from my dad’s store at the center of downtown, where we were living at the time (he had partitioned off the back end of the store to create an apartment for the family). So, I went to McCray. Seventh and eighth grades were taught at the Junior High, which was located on the same campus as the High School.

We were all a bit intimidated by the thought of entering Junior High. For one thing, it brought together all the kids from the three Elementary schools for the first time. Some of them I already knew, some of them I didn’t, even though we had all grown up in the same small town. So, rather than having the same old reliable classmates I’d always known, I was now faced with having to try to make friends with these other ‘new’ kids.

In Junior High, for the first time in our lives, we had to do homework. And rather than having just one female teacher in the same classroom throughout the entire year, we had to switch classrooms – as well as teachers – between periods and store our supplies in lockers. And some of those teachers were men! The only male teacher I’d ever had before was Mr. Held, who taught music to all the students, Grades 1-12.

But the scariest one of all was Mrs. Griffith, the teacher who later was to become my friend and mentor. When she walked into the Seventh Grade English class, I was awestruck. She was tall and slender with a somewhat regal bearing, and glided across the room in her high heeled shoes like a trained dancer. Which, as it turned out, she was. And she seemed so sophisticated – she had just moved to Colorado from L.A.!

Mrs. Griffith gave us all a rather stern look, and proceeded to give us our very first assignment: “Bring your favorite poem to class tomorrow.”

Well, no problem, I thought. I know lots of poems. But when the other kids brought in works of Byron, Shelley, Keats, and the like – none of whom I’d ever heard of before – what did I bring? A copy of *Mary Had a Little Lamb.*

No wonder Mrs. Griffith thought I could use a little help.