# School Days

*By Dorothy Baughman*

Going to a new school was a traumatic experience for me. I had attended first and second grades at the same school. Then my parents moved back to my mother's hometown, and here I was, starting a new school. And I had to walk a lot farther now.

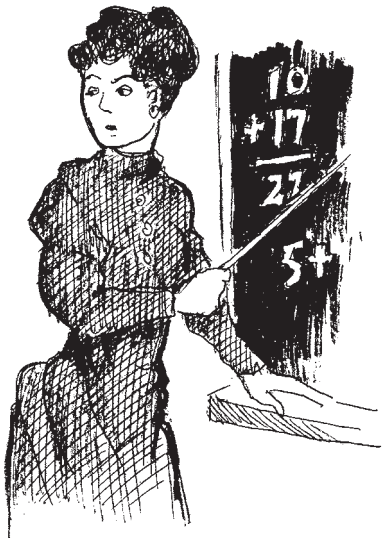
My new third-grade teacher lived below us, so she offered to pick me up. It was sort of a long walk for an 8-year-old, although in 1948, there was a lot less danger to worry about.

Mrs. Ora Mae Murchison was a short, round little woman with a resounding voice that made us stand at attention quickly. She never raised her voice much, but when she held up one hand and said, "Little folks, now listen," we "little folks" listened. She must have instilled education in her only son, too, because after he grew up, he was a principal, and then superintendent of our country schools!

Mrs. Ora Mae, as she was usually called, taught things that would never be allowed nowadays. She thought children should memorize things besides the multiplication tables.

At Christmastime we learned the Christmas story straight from the Bible and recited it in front of the whole class before school let out for the holidays. We learned the counties in our state, too, which made it a lot easier when 11th-grade history came about.

But Mrs. Murchison not only had us learn things we would need for survival; we learned proper hygiene, which was a little difficult when we still had outdoor privies at the school. After we got bathrooms the next year, Mrs. Murchison had no more trouble with little boys peeping in the slatted doors of the girls' privy!




One incident in the dead of winter caused my dad some problems. Mrs. Murchison kept a chart with gold stars for all the children who brushed their teeth, kept their hands washed, and completed other cleanliness chores. If we lied about it, she usually could tell.

So when I got my Dad up in the middle of the night to go with me to the back porch with my toothbrush and glass, he grumbled but got up. I had forgotten to brush my teeth after supper—and I was not about to give up my gold star the next day.

I brushed away, rinsed, put away my brush, and got back into bed. My dad, still grumbling, said to my mom, "Surely Mrs. Murchison would never know the difference."

"Yes she would," said my mom. "She's a mother."

And being a mother, she knew how children felt about their pets. We had rented a couple of rooms until my mom's old home place was repaired, so here we were, getting ready to move. I had a mama cat with three kittens, and I had no idea how to move them to the new house.

But Mrs. Murchison got out at the old house, helped me catch the cats, and then put them in a pillowcase. Then off we went to the new house.

Being the "new" girl in class, I got elected as my room's Halloween Queen that fall. My supportive teacher taught me how to walk up the steps while holding my dress. I would have tripped had she not done so. Third-graders are not the most adept creatures at anything. She sat in the audience and beamed as much as my parents did!

I have had other favorite teachers during my years of schooling, but Mrs. Ora Mae Murchison still stands out. I thought about her many times when I reminded forgetful children to brush their teeth—but mine didn't have to go out on a cold back porch. They didn't get gold stars for remembering, either.

If everyone had a Mrs. Murchison, I think the world would be a better place. Sometimes there is more to education than what you find in books. ❖

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