

I came across a picture recently that I hadn't looked at in a long time. It is a composite picture of my kindergarten class and the first grade, as well, since in those days, Mrs. Elizabeth Lakies looked after the first two years of schooling for all the kindergarteners and first graders at Burdell Township Rural Agricultural School. If every child was in school on picture day, that meant that Mrs. Lakies had 41 children for half a day and 21 for the whole school day. Kindergartners were in school only half days then, about two hours, since we were bused home before lunchtime.

As I looked at the picture, I wondered how many of the children I recognized, and how many were still in my class at the same school thirteen years later when we were high school seniors. I counted twelve kindergartners that were my classmates all through school. A couple were "held back" and proceeded through the school system in the next class. Two or three later went to another school in the area. A couple moved. One girl quit school when she was sixteen. And some I just plain did not recognize.

The clothes the children wore were interesting, and I looked, compared, thought back, and noticed some of the "trends" of the day, at least as far as anything remotely resembling a "trend" was common in our rural area. I expect that most of us were wearing clothes our older siblings had worn—unless we were the elders in our families.

Looking at both kindergartners and first graders, I saw that fifteen of the boys were wearing either suspenders or bib overalls. Of the fourteen girls, all seemed to be wearing dresses, though a blouse could have given the same impression. I remember that I did wear little jeans with elastic waist most days, but that day, I was wearing a dress, because I remember that frock. It was my favorite, and I think it was way too "good" for a school dress, since I played hard and had very little luck in keeping my clothes clean. This dress was red plaid taffeta with a bodice that had an overlay of black velveteen like a little vest. And, my mother had turned up my braids and tied ribbons around them. Most of the girls also had barrettes in their hair.

Mrs. Lakies looks pretty cheerful for the unbelievable job she must have had, riding herd on that bunch of kids and also trying to teach them what they needed to go on into Mrs. Engstrom's second grade classroom.

After looking at this picture for some time, I looked up another photo, this one of my senior class in front on the U.S. Capitol while we were on a senior trip. Seventeen of the nineteen in our class went on the trip. The boys and our chaperones, a young teacher and his wife, were standing a line, all the boys with their hands behind them. The photographer must have directed the pose. A mat of some kind was spread on the grass in front of them, and we five girls were sitting on that, legs tucked under us. I could see, though, that the other girls were wearing nylons and “flats,” while I had on sneakers and socks. Three of us were wearing light poplin coats. One girl was in short sleeves, and Karen was wearing the hand knit cardigan she’d made. This trip was the only time I have been in our nation’s capital—and we did tour the Capitol building as well as many of the monuments and some other “sights” in Washington. I remember nothing of it except the rotunda of the Capitol.

After all these years eight of us live within fifty miles of the village where we went to school. Six of us still have local addresses. I don’t know what that says about us, our area, or the lives we have led, but many of us still have a strong connection to this place where we trudged to the road to meet the school bus and started our education with Mrs. Lakies.