

These days, when looking ahead with trepidation in light of the environmental and political scenario that confronts us, it is no wonder that looking back in time seems to be more productive than looking to the future.

Perhaps, it is because history shows us that as a species, we have survived a lot of unimaginable conditions. I think, though, that there are those of us who also just have a natural affinity for some aspects of the past. Maybe, that is what caused some of us to pursue the study of history in our education.

Now, though, faced with the prospect of unhinged national leadership, taking a little time to look back at small, perhaps insignificant, events in our past seems to have both relevance and appeal.

I think often of my mother. As a teenager who had worked one season picking cherries and later making beds at a resort, and in between jobs, drove horses on the farm at home after her father died. The challenges she faced would have been daunting to most of us today. The little she was able to save from her first jobs was lost in a local bank failure before the widespread banking collapse in the early years of the Great Depression. She had been keeping every penny she earned to pay the tuition for a place in the one-year County Normal school that prepared young people, mostly girls, to teach in Michigan's rural one-room schools.

Someone in the area loaned her the money to pay the fees, so she was able to go to the Normal school, and she repaid the loan from her meager wages of two years' teaching in a country school.

Frances, eighteen years old, stepped into the one-room schoolhouse the fall after she graduated from County Normal, and she encountered about thirty pupils from two country districts that had combined that year because of lack of money and fewer than usual school aged children. The pupils ranged from six years old to fourteen, from a little boy who was hemophiliac to husky teenaged farm boys who were far bigger and stronger than slim young Frances.

But, she did have an unseen advantage that was not evident to her pupils. She was the seventh of nine children in her family—all but Frances were boys. Someone said to her once that she must have been "spoiled," being the only girl. She answered that it was quite the opposite. She had to be tough to survive.

There were a few close calls on the way to adulthood. When she was five, she crawled under the team of draft horses to show how friendly they were, and one inadvertently stepped on her new dress, tearing it. And there was the time she and some brothers were throwing stones at the top of an apple tree to knock down apples, and one stone hit her on the head, leaving a trail of blood all the way to the house and a scar that remained.

Frances and her brothers had fun, too. Catching Fred and Joe, the work horses, the youngsters enjoyed riding on Sundays until their dad found out what they were doing and told them to leave those horses alone. They needed Sunday off, too! But, whatever the boys found to do, Frances wanted to play her part.

Physical punishment was not outlawed or even discouraged in schools in those days. Older boys were known to "break up" a school and drive a teacher away. I don't think anything like that ever happened over the decades Burdell #7 was operating, but I did hear that Frances shook up an 8th grade boy and sat him down hard at his desk for some bullying he had engaged in. And she straightened up a neighbor girl who tried to

create disorder by repeatedly getting up, going to the pencil sharpener, and grinding her pencil noisily and unnecessarily to disrupt the classroom.

Frances drove the six miles from her home to the school in a Model T Ford coupe belonging to one of her brothers. She sometimes had a flat tire, but she knew how to patch a tire and pump it up again with a hand pump.

I think the children at Burdell #7 actually got a pretty good education from that eighteen year old girl. At least, most of them entered adulthood with the ability to read, write legibly, and do necessary math, and they had a basic idea how the governing process was supposed to work. Even the most disobedient and unruly of those students would never have even considered participating in the Insurrection. of January 6, 2021.