

Autobiography - Carol (Tesch) Whyms

Carol went to a country school and graduated from Oakfield High School in 1939. She and her good friend, Hortense Schoepke, took the two-year rural teaching course at Oshkosh Teachers' College. Carol got a one-room school near Waupun. It was very primitive; no electricity, only a couple hanging kerosene lamps, a big old stone furnace in the back corner, and a woodshed with kindling and briquettes. War was imminent, so many of the farmers' sons and hired men had already been drafted, and Carol could not find anyone in the district who had time to come to the school to start the fire.

Beginning teachers were given small schools, but by the time the fall moving was finished, she had 30 students in all 8 grades, and she was only nineteen. Four students were from Hispanic, migrant worker families. The two oldest were 13 and in fourth grade. Carol's heart bled for them; she knew that next year they would be working in the fields from dawn to dusk, and would go through life with only a fourth grade education.

That December, Pearl Harbor turned our world upside down! Schools distributed ration books (sugar, gas, shoes, etc.) and everyone soon learned to live by the war-time slogan: "Eat it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without!" Stockings were hard to find, and women did not wear slacks or jeans yet, so we painted stockings on our legs with a lotion-like paint from the cosmetics department. Stockings still had seams, so a friend would draw seams on the back of your legs with an eyebrow pencil.

All the rubber was needed for tires for military vehicles; there was none left for elastic for underwear, so these garments were made with a placket on one side and a button at the waist. It was possible, as you were walking along, that the button would give way and your underwear would suddenly be down around your ankles. All you could do was step out of them, stuff them in your purse, and hope no one had been watching.

In winter, Carol boarded with a local family. On the coldest weekends, her father would take her to her district on Sunday afternoon, drop off her suitcase, then take her to school. If it was -10 degrees Fahrenheit outside, it was -10 degrees Fahrenheit in that school building! She would get a good fire going, then "bank it" with a couple more buckets of coal and sprinkle a few ashes on top to keep it from burning too fast, then walk to the home of her host family for supper.

By 1944, everybody was getting "war weary," so Carol and her students (she was now teaching in South Byron) made up a Christmas play about a post-war family watching TV and talking about all their latest conveniences. In February, her soldier-boy, Charles Whyms, came home on furlough. They were married, then he returned to Europe and she finished teaching the school year. That summer, the war was over, so they moved onto a farm and raised their family.

In 1963, there was a severe shortage of teachers, so Carol and Hortense were asked to teach at the Lamartine School. They now needed four years of college to teach, so they went to Marian College evenings, Saturdays, and summers. That completed, Carol returned to Oshkosh and earned a Master's Degree. In 1971, Belle Reynolds School opened; a modern "open-concept" school, and all satellite schools were closed.

Carol and Charles enjoyed many hobbies together, especially photography. They took several evening classes and often went out on weekends to get nature pictures. Carol also took pictures for the Belle Reynolds yearbook, and took the "Wall of Fame" pictures for many years. She very much enjoyed being a 4-H Photography Project leader for 23 years. After her retirement, Carol did a little tutoring, babysat her grandchildren, and did much volunteer work. In 2002, she received an award as one of Fond du Lac County's Outstanding Senior Citizens.