



Memories of a Coventry School in 1939

The summer of 1939 ended and we were off to school. Not to a big brick building with stairs and doors saying "GIRLS" and "BOYS", but to a little building, smaller than our house and made of wood. As I had skipped a grade, I was placed in 5th grade with one other. Sixth grade had one pupil and so on down the line having 11 pupils in 6 grades. Bobby was in second grade and Hazel didn't go to school because there was no kindergarten class.

Our road was just a jig-jog off Route 44 and we walked to the eastern end, about a mile down from our house. There were several houses on that side and there were some children in the 4th house. So, we all waited for the bus every morning with a girl named Blanche who was a ward of the state.

She lived in the orphanage, the last house on the road. It was very large and could be seen from Route 44. She was a bit older and had the worst hands I had ever seen on a child. They were always raw and red and I asked her once, "Why?" She said that to earn her keep she did the dishes and lots of laundry. She was so matter of fact about it. But I was tuned into Orphan Annie and I couldn't understand why she just didn't have a mother and she never said.

And, so, we soon learned from Mrs. Michalek (our one teacher) how it works in one room. She started with the 1st grade and taught them something. Then they did their deskwork. And so on up the line. All sat quietly and had projects to do depending upon their grade. There was never a rumpus and, except for using the outhouse or during our lesson, not a whole lot of questions. It was a great way to learn a lot of things all at once.

We had a morning break, a lunch break and one in the afternoon. We were taught to maintain those three times for the outhouse and drinks of water. The water was in a jug and cold from the well in the schoolyard. The outhouse had one seat for girls and a separate entrance for the boys. We were all used to outhouses as everyone had one at home. Still, at home we could use the facilities inside when it was really cold.

When winter came, Mrs Michalek asked the boys, in turn, to bring in the wood from a pile outside the door and to load the stove. Pollution? I don't remember any.

We had subsistence foods from the Federal government, though I don't know why. But I remember butter being one of them. Why, I don't know because, except for us, everyone had a cow. And, in that one room school, we learned to brush our teeth. For some reason the government gave us all a toothbrush and Dr Lyon's tooth powder. The teacher taught us how to brush, rinse and spit. Most important was to spit. Do not swallow! Well, that sure was exciting. Our mother thought that was a neat idea and bought toothbrushes for Hazel and Teddy. The boys used to have spitting contests on our back steps as we were outside for all things until it was bitter cold.

We had a spelling bee every Easter and the prize was a chocolate egg. I won every time. Well, twice anyway. Now I understand that some people have a brain for words and some for math. We also celebrated May Day with a pole and ribbons and May baskets and all the parents came. How they got there, I'll never know.





Birthplace of Nathan Hale

We also had a play each year and I always had the most lines to recite. I was a tiny little thing and very shy, but I had a great memory. I learned everyone's parts and could cue them right through the entire presentation: words, gestures and movements.

It's hard to imagine 11 children of all ages playing and getting along, going outside every day, unless it was pouring, and never a fight. It is true that we had a great teacher but we were all well disciplined at home. Any misbehavior in the school would be worthy of a good spanking when we got home. There was no such thing as 'time out'.

Every Friday afternoon, Mrs. Michalek would have us place our arms on our desks as a pillow and she would read to us for the last hour of the day. Pond Hill School was a great experience! And then in 1941, I went off to the North Street School with just two grades, seventh and eighth.

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