

Iva Carrell Foster

An Honoured Centenarian

1921 -



I have always been an independent and extroverted person who enjoys spending time with family and friends. I have travelled to every continent and have been active in local community clubs and projects wherever I have lived. Today my small apartment in Beaverlodge allows me to see and greet those coming and going. I think my smiling face is a welcome sight for many visitors and residents here. Some of my former students live in the same care facility as I do, always happy to share their memories of me as their teacher.

But how did my teaching career get me to where I am today? Well, here is my story.

I was born in a log house near the river at Beaverlodge, Alberta, to Ruth and Ralph Carrell. My grandfather was the famous Rutabaga Johnson, a local settler, and store owner. For Grade One, I rode a horse two miles to school in the old Town of Beaverlodge. A few years later when Dad moved us into Beaverlodge, I crossed a

creek and walked down the hill through farmland to go to school. I spent the rest of my school years in Beaverlodge at the large four room brick school that stood where the United Church is today. Although petite, I was extremely fast and quite active in sports. I won pin money in the summer running races and in the winter speed skating.

Having been valedictorian of my Grade 8 class, it was no surprise that in September of 1939 I moved to Edmonton to begin teacher training at Normal School, (an extension of the University of Alberta). This one-year course set the tone for my teaching career.

After my academic year I returned to the Beaverlodge area to gain the practicum teaching experience required to earn a Certified Permanent Teacher status. A local teacher was leaving his post early so I taught for May and June in a one room school near Hythe.

I spent that summer at home with the family before taking a position at Craigellachie School, south and east of Hinton Trail Hall for one year. I had grades 1-9 with 39 students, including two taking high school by correspondence. The students came to school by horses and the farmer family across from the school did the janitorial work. I was very well dressed, wearing suits although trekking through the bush to and from work I wore trousers under my skirts in winter of course. My mother made me big-pocketed smocks to protect my clothes from chalk dust.

I boarded with family friends who lived a mile away through the bush so that they could pay off a loan to my father. They gave



**Iva Carrell, 1941,
First Year
Teaching**

me the only bedroom and they slept on the couch. My salary was \$52.00 a month and they appreciated receiving \$10 in hard cash regularly during the war time.

One February day, at lunchtime, I took the students to the pond about a quarter mile from the school. I had been given two pairs of girls' skates and the boys had some pairs between them so they took turns wearing the skates. This counted as their physical education class.

Spotting a car at the school we headed back to the classroom to discover that the School Superintendent had come to inspect my teaching.

I explained about the skates and the beneficial exercise gained by the students. I received a very good commendation report for my permanent certificate.

Given a choice of schools for my second year I moved to the Two Lakes School north of Lake Saskatoon Provincial Park. Charles Dixon was a frame building with a bedroom in the basement and two upper rooms for grades 1-4 and 6-9. Shirley Carter and I lived in the basement. We had to keep the fires lit, the ashes removed, and the cut wood stocked. Doing the janitorial chores meant a small pay bonus instead of paying the cost for housing. My annual salary here was \$1000 as I was principal of the school, sharing the teaching responsibilities with Shirley. I had the 6-9 grades and the supervision of the high school courses.

Having saved up \$200, I then decided to make a career shift to nursing. My brother had enlisted in the Air Force and I wanted to act as an airline stewardess for the Air Force in England. However, you had to be a trained nurse so I enlisted in the free three year nursing program at Edmonton General Hospital. This was a demanding course with very long hours and challenging working conditions but family relations provided some breaks from the course load. I completed two years of this program. The administration was sad to lose me for the third year but the war was now over in 1945 and I had decided to marry a Sexsmith area farmer.

Living on the farm meant tight finances so I taught and substituted for many years in Sexsmith, Teepee Creek, and Grande Prairie. I had a good car so I could travel on the winter roads. When my children were of school age, I went back to teaching a Grade 9 class of 20 students, but I only did



Iva Foster is in the back row on the left. Grade 9 class, June 1959.

a half time contract the next year. My youngest daughter remembered me being the sub for her class. She also said, "We were raised with a dining room that doubled as a schoolroom- tested on everything - complete with a full world

map instead of art! When it was -40°, schools were closed but we didn't have the day off. Instead, Mom would push the table back for phys ed which consisted of us learning the Cossack and standing on our heads with no wall. Looking back now it was quite amusing!!" Education was important would be my reply.

Many fun times were had in those years. Kay Mackie and I dressed up as Grade 9 students and went to the high school dance. We were awarded the best costume prize. Many laughs were shared at the end of the evening when our identities were revealed to the audience.



**Iva Foster
Sexsmith
1965**

One day two grade 9 boys brought in some mice in a jam tin hoping that they could scare the girls. I told them the mice would die as there were no air holes in the lid. I kept the mice under my eye on my desk. I detained the boys after school and had them do a dissection on the mice. One boy had to leave or be sick but I was fine due to my nursing training. That boy met up with me at a school reunion 30-40 years later and told me he still remembered doing that dissection.

High school trips such as to Rome with 35 students under my supervision resulted in



interesting times too. One boy got lost and spent all his money trying to find our hotel. He was almost left behind, but our hotel was called and asked if any Canadians were there. He was so glad to see me and the bus just before it was due to pull out. He cried on my shoulder on the way to the airport. When we got back to Sexsmith, his mom was dumbfounded at her son's adventures.

Shortly after I decided to remarry and therefore ended my teaching career.

I sum up my life and career as being lots of fun. I enjoyed following my path and I plan to continue to have fun as long as I am able to do so.



Thank you, Iva, for sharing your story
and allowing Sus Mills bring it to
NWARA.