

An Incident from Grade School----Going to the Principal's Office

I had nearly forgotten about this incident until yesterday at a social function for an ice breaker and get-to-know one another game/exercise. We were requested to tell the name of our grade school, where it was and a memorable incident. Mine was Melbourne Heights School in Jefferson County, Louisville, Kentucky. We lived in a southern section of Louisville where the children went to this county school by bus. They had the eight and four system, whereas the city schools had the 6-3-3, six years of elementary, three years of junior high, and three years of senior high. I had transferred when we moved from a one-room Lutheran parochial school just a few weeks into the third grade. That was a hard adjustment of going from a class of seven to one of 36. Most of the kids had been together since first grade. I didn't feel a part of the majority group for that reason and later due to my spiritual awakening just before the seventh grade. My new associates then were of the old-time conservative groups where things of 'the world' were discouraged—things like card playing, movies, dancing, smoking, etc. It was in the seventh grade that most of the class took ballroom dancing lessons on Saturday afternoons. My father would not have paid for me to go even if I didn't have the taboo against dancing. (In midlife I changed my mind and even did a liturgical dance.) You see I didn't feel accepted at home (How long does it take for a kid to get the message when being told she wasn't really wanted?) nor accepted at school. I plugged along doing my best and hoping to get the American Legion's Good Citizen award at the end of the year. They canceled the presentation of that recognition (but I got it when I graduated from Senior High).

In eighth grade it was customary to elect a student as the 'safety counselor.' I really don't know what was expected of such a person, but lo and behold, when we had the class meeting, I was elected. I was really surprised--overwhelmed, really. Here was a group where I didn't fit in very well, didn't feel a part of them or accepted, and I was elected to an office, as fluid as that might be. I worked with the principal who probably suggested I ride on each of the three busses we had and encourage good behavior. I did that but didn't understand the energy youngsters have after they've been sitting most of the day and so glad to be free for the next seventeen hours or so. It wasn't much, but it sure was an affirmation to my personhood.

One day I was asked to go to the principal's office (Or she asked me to go with her?). Usually, kids go to the principal's office after a misdeed that the teacher wasn't prepared for. I was anxious, but didn't have any dread. She and I had developed a casual relationship through my 'big' job of safety coordinator.

The reason for the visit was that she had heard that someone in our class had gone to our regular teacher about our music teacher. We had music maybe twice a week with the first grade teacher. Her students went home at noon. The situation was that she talked 'down' to the eighth graders, like she must have talked to the first graders. We all were uncomfortable with this. Well, we all loved our regular teacher who related to us as adults. She went home on the same bus as I did. I took the opportunity to tell her how we thirteen year olds bristled with the way and tone the music teacher spoke to us. I asked her if she could talk to Miss First Grade teacher. I suppose she did, for the purpose of this visit to the principal's office was to ask me if I knew who it was. I think I blew her mind when

I said it was I. After she recovered from the surprise of this confession, she said that it was inappropriate for me to do that. She said I had had a lot of responsibility that year as Safety Counselor, but I need not take on more. And that was that. I never told anyone about it, and the principal, Miss Reid, and I remained friends. I hadn't thought about the occasion until yesterday when we played the 'get acquainted' game.

It brought to mind the sadness I lived with in those days—not being able to share have with parents the satisfaction of the affirmation of my classmates and this rather funny episode. They showed very little interest in me, my activities, or joys in my life, but it was a good story to share with my neighbors.

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