

Fort Hays State University

FHSU Scholars Repository

College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse
Oral Histories

Archives Online

1996

Interview with Elsie Witt

Frank Jarmer

Fort Hays State University

Elsie Crow Witt

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors>

Content Disclaimer

The primary source materials contained in the Fort Hays State University Special Collections and Archives have been placed there for research purposes, preservation of the historical record, and as reflections of a past belonging to all members of society. Because this material reflects the expressions of an ongoing culture, some items in the collections may be sensitive in nature and may not represent the attitudes, beliefs, or ideas of their creators, persons named in the collections, or the position of Fort Hays State University.

Recommended Citation

Jarmer, Frank and Witt, Elsie Crow, "Interview with Elsie Witt" (1996). *College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories*. 187.

<https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ors/187>

This Audio Recording is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives Online at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Education One-Room Schoolhouse Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository.

CHAPTER II: INTERVIEW WITH ELSIE CROW WITT

Elsie Crow graduated from Cunningham High School in 1930. She had no money to go to college and had no idea how she was going to make a living. One day, a friend called Elsie and asked her to go to Pratt with her to take the county examinations. Elsie refused but her mother had heard the conversation. Later, she retracted her refusal and went along to take the test. She passed and received a teachers certificate.

Elsie then contacted the county superintendent, Ed Nance, who had been her teacher when she was in grade school. She asked him if there were any schools that needed teachers. He said only one. That one was Little Gem school south of Spivey, Kansas. He explained the reason they didn't have a teacher was because they didn't pay very much, and nobody wanted the job. Elsie didn't care how much they paid. She just wanted a job. Elsie couldn't drive, she didn't even have a drivers license, so her Mother took her down to Spivey and she applied for the position. She didn't make very much of an impression on them. The next day one of the school board members went to Wichita where he saw Frank Doty from Cunningham, who was selling cattle in Wichita. The board member told him that Elsie Crow had applied for their school and he wondered if he knew her. Frank Doty just painted a glowing picture of how smart Elsie was, how nice she was, and how wonderful she was. A few days later she got a letter from them asking if she would teach for \$75 a month. She had asked for \$85 a month, but they had another woman who was willing to take \$75 a month. Elsie wrote back and accepted the \$75 a month offer.

This little old school was in the middle of a whole section or more of pasture. It sat up on

the yard was absolutely full of prairie dogs and holes. Elsie taught there for two years. It

as an experience she would never have again. She got \$75 a month both school years she

ught there. The only problem she had was the kids were lonely and they would stay after school

and help her do all the work. One of the board members came to the school and told her they wanted her to quit having the children do the work that she was getting paid to do. That's the only problem she had.

She would have stayed except, someone from Raymond school came over and asked her to come to their school. They would give her \$85 a month. Elsie taught there for two years. The first year she was at Raymond she got \$85 a month. Then came that awful time when President Roosevelt had to close the banks, and everybody was broke. The next year the school board renewed her contract for only \$65 a month.

The next school to contact Elsie was Bross. Bross is located south of St. Leo. Bross offered to pay her \$80 a month, a \$15 a month raise. Elsie moved to Bross, and taught there for two years.

Then somebody from Waterloo called. It was a little tiny town and had a church and everything. Waterloo sounded very good to Elsie since her other schools had been out on the prairie. She accepted their offer and taught there. That was the first school she taught in that had a church close by. They had a Presbyterian Church and a Catholic school. Waterloo had a good bunch of people, and Elsie liked them all. She taught there for two years. She got married the summer following her second year there. The people she boarded with attended her wedding. They came by and whispered as they went out that her school house had burned down that night! That made a good story, the teacher got married and the school house burned down. That was in July of 1938. They told Elsie school would be held in the Presbyterian church basement while a new school was built. Elsie continued to teach at Waterloo two more years. She wanted to stay

but, felt after four years she had given them all she could of herself and any moral teaching she had. She felt that they were entitled to a different teacher. She was the only teacher, the only person that was ever there, no music teacher came in, nobody came in, it was just her.

Next Elsie went over to Pleasant Hill, south and west of Zenda, close to the Zenda cemetery. Elsie taught their two years. It was just like all the other schools, except Waterloo. It was just out on the prairie. There were no trees on the school yard, just the buildings and the two toilets outside. The toilets were as far away as they could get. All the buildings were made of wood, and seemed old. In some of the schools the library consisted of little book shelves. There were never more than 25 books and none of them were new. Every one of these schools had a coal shed. Most of the schools did not have a piano. Since Elsie could sing, she led her students acappella in wonderful music programs. If the school had a piano, Elsie would get someone to come in and play for the programs.

Elsie changed schools this time because the school where she lived just begged her to come and teach there. She was living in Rago at the time, the location of the Raymond School. It was a school she had taught at before. She switched because it was right at home. She was just going to teach two years, because her certificate would expire then. After that Elsie and her husband, Eula, were going to make a living from farming.

About this time Eula got drafted to go to the war. Elsie had no way of making a living, and they sure didn't have any money. So, she went to Wichita University that summer to renew her certificate. Oh how Elsie hated to go. They told Eula he could stay till fall, then he had to report for duty. Elsie stayed in Wichita all summer and went to school. She got her certificate

that summer and came home. One day shortly afterwards, Elsie went out to get the mail and there was a notice from the draft board. Due to the fact that they had 200 head of hogs and a lot of cattle, the Army changed Eula's classification. This allowed him to stay home. Elsie had spent all her money going to college and already had a school, so she couldn't back out of her teaching contract.

Elsie's last teaching move was from Rago to Cunningham in 1943. When she found out she was moving to Cunningham she called the county superintendent and asked if there were any schools that were looking for teachers close to Cunningham. He said Meade Creek had an opening. She applied for that position. This was only the second time she ever applied for a job. All of her other schools had always asked her to come and teach. Meade Creek was two miles south and five miles east of Cunningham. Elsie taught her final three years there. The last year that Elsie taught at Meade Creek she got \$200 a month. That was the highest paid of any country school teacher in the county. By that time, Elsie and Eula thought they could make a living without her teaching salary. Elsie started teaching in 1930 and taught for 16 years. The only teaching she ever did after that was substituting in the high school in Cunningham. She had no right to. She just had a certificate, but they needed her and they hired her. She retired in 1946.

This is an example of what teachers experienced in those early years. Elsie asked where she could stay when she got her first school. The school board member shook his head and said, "That's why we can't find a teacher. There is no place to stay except one family." He told Elsie their name and said they are a fine family. "That's the only place you can stay," he said. He had

already asked if they would keep a teacher and they agreed. Her room and board was \$18 a month. Since nobody else would keep the teacher, Elsie never went to see the family.

The Sunday before school started Elsie's Dad took her down and she could not believe it! It was a little house built into the side of a hill. She could see there weren't any other buildings there except a barn. There was pasture all around, nothing but pasture land. There was no bathroom of course, and they did not even have an outside toilet. There were trees out behind the barn and that's where you went. The people Elsie boarded with told her that she didn't want to walk through the pastures because there were bulls in all of them. That really scared her. When she went in the house it was just one big room. All it had in it was a kitchen range, a kitchen table and chairs, a baby bed, and one rocking chair. That was every bit of furniture the family owned. Then Elsie saw another door. It led into a bedroom that held only a bed and a dresser. It didn't even have a chair, that's all there was, nothing else. Elsie wondered where in the world she was supposed to stay, as the household was a husband and wife and a little baby. She was informed that her room was upstairs. Elsie's father carried her suitcase and opened the door. To her surprise there were no floor boards, only ground. They had cut the steps out in the dirt in the side of the hill. The steps just had loose boards laid on top of them. She went up the steps and there was the teeniest little room she had ever seen. It had a bed, one little night stand with a coal oil light, and one straight chair. That were no other furnishings in that small room. When Elsie sat down on the bed it started squeaking and squeaking and just came alive with mice! Mice came running out from under the bed and ran in all directions. She discovered they had made the mattress out of corn shucks and the mice liked it. By this time her dad had already gone home.

Elsie was scared to death. She was so scared that she thought if there was a telephone she would call home and tell them to come and get her. There wasn't any telephone, she couldn't do anything but stay.

Every night when she came home from school the bed was full of mice. Elsie would stand on that one little chair and step over into the bed after she had chased the mice off. She would crawl in bed and pull the covers over her head and fasten them tight around herself so the mice couldn't get in during the night. Of course, in the night she would get hot and let her head out. This was unfortunate because Elsie had her first permanent on her hair right before school started. It made her hair look like a big Russian thistle. Many nights she awakened with mice hollering, because they were caught in her hair. Elsie's father brought some mouse traps down because she was petrified. The first night the traps were set she woke up and heard something clattering. A rat was walking across the floor with a trap caught on his body. That's the way the life was.

The people Elsie stayed with that first year were so poor lots of times they didn't have anything to put in her sandwiches except green tomato slices. She started bringing food from home on weekends. She kept the food in her suitcase, but the mice ate holes in it and ruined the food. It was a mess, and it was wonderful all at the same time.

Elsie had to walk a mile up a country lane to the school yard. She was surprised to see all those prairie dogs. The children came from all around and were so happy to have school started. They had nothing except their parents and Elsie, that's all. She was their contact with the outside world. One of the families had a radio and another had a telephone. The families were so full of love and caring. They felt sorry for Elsie because she was young and naive. Elsie had some big

boys in school and this was something interesting. One boy that Elsie had in the eighth grade during her first year of teaching graduated that year. The next year he came up and asked her for a date. He was probably 16 or 17. Elsie had just turned 18 in August before her first school year started. On the first day of school Elsie asked the students to help her. She confessed to them she had never been in a country school before. They said the first thing she needed to do was tell them about yourself. They knew she didn't know anything, and they were going to help her out. That's when they told her, "Miss Crow, you are supposed to write your list of rules on the blackboard". Elsie didn't know what they meant and they said like may I sharpen my pencil, may leave the room, may I do this and that. Elsie said she hadn't thought of any rules because she never had any like that. She told them she would think of some rules and write them on the board the next day. When they came the next day she had her rules written on the board. She used this same rule every year she taught. She found out that other schools expected to have rules, too. Elsie's rule was "DO WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU AS LONG AS IT DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH THE RIGHTS OF OTHERS." They were astonished that this was the only rule, but they could see that it had merit. When they would start to practice for a program or something, they would get excited and would get kind of noisy. When it got too noisy Elsie would start to say "OH, OH wait". They'd say, "We know Miss Crow, we can't do anything that bothers anybody else." We just got along famously.

One day Elsie looked out the window of the school and saw the lady where she boarded coming. When she got there she knocked on the door and cried. She wanted Elsie to come outside. She said, "The people have come to take our stove because we can't pay for it."

She wondered if Elsie could pay two or three months rent in advance so they could pay for it. The stove was all they had to cook and heat and everything, so Elsie paid the rent in advance. That's the way they got along. Her landlords were all wonderful people and Elsie still has contact with them today. She never had experiences like these at any of the other schools she went to. She had nice places to stay. Elsie just didn't stay long because she would get a better opportunity.

Some people had a clause in their contract that said they could not date anyone in their district. Elsie never had that in her contract. She definitely dated someone in her district, and eventually married him. The night they were married was when the Waterloo school house burned down. They did have school in the Presbyterian church for a long time. They did move over into the new building before the school year was finished. It was just lovely. Elsie taught for two years in the new building.

Elsie bought her own school supplies. It never occurred to her that anyone else would buy supplies. They didn't have many supplies. The kids had their own crayons and Elsie had very little. After she taught 2 or 3 years someone told her that the school board should have been buying them all the time.

Elsie would go to school and build the fire, sweep the floors, and clean the blackboards. Here is something that is truly amazing. She taught for 16 years, many of those times there were no telephones, and she never missed a day. She almost always had to walk. When Elsie taught down at Bross she walked 2.5 miles. The people where she boarded had a car but it never occurred to them to offer to take her to school.

During the second year Elsie taught, as she started off to school one morning the landlord told her they were moving. They were going to move $\frac{2}{3}$ of a mile down the road. Elsie said, "There isn't anything down there." They said, "There is a building down there." Elsie said, "You mean that granary?" They said, "Yes." She knew there wasn't an outhouse of any kind. It was just a granary sitting out there in the pasture. Elsie couldn't believe it, but she didn't have anything to say about it. There weren't even any trees to hide behind. So when she had to go to the bathroom, and it was a long ways to school, she would still walk to the school even at night. The whole time she was scared to death of everything.

Elsie walked to school in blizzards and rain and never gave it a thought. She never once thought, "Oh, poor Elsie!" That was just what people did. Build your fire and after bit the kids would come. One year, it was the second year she taught, they had a terrible blizzard. It was the one that killed the school kids in Colorado, because their bus got stuck and they froze to death. Nobody had a telephone and Elsie just knew she had to go because she thought someone might show up. She didn't know how bad it was. She got out and walked to school. In some places she had to walk over the fences since they were covered with snow. Fortunately there were no bulls out there to get her. She got to school and felt nearly frozen to death. The lock had filled with snow and was frozen so she couldn't get her key in. Elsie was just about to pass out and God told her to put her mouth down, just not to touch any of the metal, and breath and breath into the lock. At least she guessed somebody told her, and He was the only one around. She did, and the ice melted. The key worked and she got in the school house. Elsie built a fire and by that time she knew no one would ever come to school. It was a blizzard like she had never seen

before. She laid down on the recitation bench and covered herself up with the curtains they used when they had program. Elsie laid there until noon. When no one came by noon she tackled the homeward journey again. Things happened in those days like they never will again.

No one was the boss except the school board. The school boards always cooperated. They were a wonderful, wonderful bunch of people and Elsie had a lot of them. The one exception was the lady who told her not to have the kids do the work after school. They trusted her judgment, and she never had any problems with them. She felt the responsibility so much that she had to teach them, or at least set an example for them, about good manners, kind speaking, and no swearing. That was her duty. Elsie strongly believed that teaching them how to be a lady or a gentleman was as important as teaching them how to add $2 + 2$. She thought the teachers were held to a higher standard. She never did anything to irritate or upset the board or superintendent. She was raised to be so very, very careful. She was very careful about things. As teachers, they were put up on a pedestal. They were absolutely to do no wrong. The children sensed that and they told her after she got to know them a little better about something that Miss So and So did or that Mister did that irritated them. Something that they knew was wrong. They felt able to tell Elsie about it.

There were no discipline problems to speak of. One time when Elsie was teaching at Rago there was this darling little four year old boy. He did something very obnoxious and without even thinking Elsie grabbed him and gave him a swat on the rear end. Then she said, "Oh! Ouch Tubby that hurt me worse than it did you!" She just gave him one swat. The next day that little boy brought a paddle to school that his daddy made. It had holes bored in it and he said, "Miss

Crow, if I ever do anything wrong again I don't want you to hurt your hand. So I had my daddy make this paddle." Elsie didn't have many discipline problems. She doesn't remember any teacher who did. No, she never used that paddle, she didn't have to.

Elsie was the student's only contact with the outside world and they were eager for something besides mom and dad. She had been a soloist when she was in school in Cunningham, had won first place in extemporaneous speaking, and things like that. They felt that she had a few talents that might rub off on them, and they were eager for any of those things.

The children used to want to walk Elsie home. There would be five or six of them going the same direction and they would say they would like to walk her home. Elsie knew they were lonely, and hated to go back home. They admired their parents and got along with them. They knew it was just go home and go to work milking cows, feeding pigs, and going to bed. They didn't have anything interesting to do. Elsie got invited many, many times to stay all night in a student's home. Not just Elsie, this was just the way teachers were treated. She would stay all night and they would fix her lunch for school the next day. Some families were big. It was fun walking to school with the children.

One day a man came and knocked on the school house door. He didn't want to frighten the class but they were getting ready to hunt rabbits. Elsie said she didn't know anything about it, but it was OK. At noon recess the children got to watch them. They had great big net fences around great territories and the men were there on horseback. They would chase those rabbits into the net fences and catch them. The man shipped them back East alive. That's where Elsie met her future husband that day. The first time she ever saw him, he was this good, good looking

young man on a white horse. He was out there helping catch rabbits and she thought, "OH, gosh! Isn't he handsome!" A day or two later she went to town with the lady where she was boarding. She was sitting out in the car and this same young man drove up in his car. He had his white horse in a trailer behind. He got out and went in the store. When the landlady came out Elsie asked her who that was. She said, "That's our neighbor." Elsie was very interested in that neighbor and was for many many years. They were married in 1938. He died in 1984.

Another time, in second grade phonics class, Elsie told the children to give her words that ended in "it". They named every word they could think of and finally one little boy said "SHIT.". Elsie said, "Well yes, junior that does end in "it" but that isn't a word". She was 20 years old then, and had never heard that word before. She saw the children looking at each other but paid no attention to them. When noon came the two girls in the eighth grade said, "Miss Crow, we have to talk to you, we have to talk to you." They took her way out to the toilet and said, "Miss Crow the word shit is a word." Elsie said, "I never heard of it. What does it mean?" They explained to her what it meant. They explained it in such a funny way, they said it was *number two*. Elsie didn't have any idea what number two was either. She had never heard that expression before. They finally convinced her it was a word. She finally understood what it was. They educated Elsie as much as she did them. It was all such good fun. Elsie felt so lucky, and still does.

Everybody that Elsie ever boarded with still has contact with her. Two ladies that Elsie lived with moved to Hilltop Manor in Cunningham because Elsie works there. One family came all the way from New York City and personally brought their mother to Hilltop Manor. She

stayed until she died. Elsie was on good terms with all of the people she worked with because they were as important to her as she was to them. Elsie was lonely too. She was away from home, didn't have a car, and was ignorant about the world. All she knew was Cunningham and so she was as eager for their friendship as they were for hers. Teachers don't have to count on that today. After she moved back to Cunningham, and she'd been married for years, they would go to Kingman and be walking down the street, and hear somebody say, "Miss Crow, Miss Crow." Elsie would turn around and there would be somebody she had taught years ago. They would visit and have a good time.

The county superintendent was the only classroom supervision Elsie had that she knew of. She never knew when he was coming. When he came, he didn't even knock on the door. He would just open the door and walk in during class and it scared everyone absolutely to pieces. Elsie used to get so scared that she could hardly go ahead with class. Sometimes she would be so frightened she would lower her voice and no one could hear her. The superintendent would just walk around and watch what everybody was doing. He would go to the teachers desk and look around on it and look in the grade book. He really checked on everything. When he left he'd never tell the teacher anything. The kids were scared, and Elsie was too. Elsie guessed she passed somehow because she never got fired. The visit from the superintendent was only once a year.

The first certificate all Elsie had to do was take the test at Pratt. If you passed you got your certificate in the mail that's how you knew you passed. When those two years were up she had to have her certificate renewed. She had to have some training and went to Hays for two months that summer. She boarded there and went to the college, but it was not a college course.

They had college teachers but did not get college credit. She had to take several courses and another test. That's how she renewed her first certificate. After that if she paid the state \$2 at renewal and if the county superintendent gave his approval they would renew her certificate. The superintendent was supposed to know if a teacher was good enough to teach. Then toward the very last of Elsie's service teachers had to have some kind of college. She took penmanship, children's literature, and various classes that she thought weren't really pertinent to school but she got enough hours to renew her certificate. That was the last time she renewed a certificate. Elsie renewed her first certificate at Hays. At the test site she was informed she had two options. Option one was to take the test to renew her current level certificate. Option two was to take the same test along with an additional English history exam. The English history exam enabled a teacher to qualify for a higher level teaching certificate. Elsie chose to renew her current certificate because she wasn't confident in her knowledge of English history. She completed her test and turned it in. As she was leaving the room she noticed paper on the floor. As she picked it up she glanced at the paper. Someone had inadvertently dropped a copy of the English history exam. She realized her perception of the English history exam was incorrect. Elsie decided she could pass the English history exam. She had learned that subject matter while attending Cunningham Grade School. She approached the person in charge and asked permission to change her mind about taking the English history exam. Elsie qualified for the higher level certificate with a score of 91.

They had a lot of faith in the teacher's ability. They had to trust them. Just think, there you had a whole bunch of kids, you were miles away from anybody, had no telephone, no car, you

had nothing. Yet Elsie can't recall ever having to send anyone home or anyone ever getting hurt in all those years.

They played ball at every school Elsie had. Everyone from the first grade up to the eighth grade played. Those big kids just took the little ones under their wings. They had to choose up sides, and of course they had to choose the little kids. They all learned how to play ball. Elsie always played too she never did umpire. There wasn't any interaction between schools though. They never competed with anybody in anything. They didn't have any athletic programs. They played ball but didn't have any competition. That's about all the activities they did until Elsie moved to Waterloo. Riggs nursery was right next to the school. Nearly every day after lunch her class would go on an excursion. They had all kinds of trees and flowers planted there. Elsie and her students always ate lunch outdoors. They just sat in one big bunch and everybody talked away and had great fun together. Kids today would gang up and be buddy buddies in their small groups to eat. When they got through they would go over to Riggs nursery and wander around and see everything. That's the only place Elsie ever taught where you could go any place. At the other schools you just stayed right there.

Each school had a water pump, and it was always outside. Most of the schools had a little tiny room built on where you came in. They called it the cloak room. It was just a little tiny room, about eight feet square, and had a cement floor. The only thing in it were some boards on the wall that had hangers. This was where the kids hung their coats. There was always a little table in the cloak room. On that table was a pitcher, a long handled drinking ladle, a wash basin, and a bar of soap. Everybody drank out of that ladle, and they always used the same towel. It

never occurred to them there was anything wrong with that. At night the water in the basin would freeze. In the mornings they had to thaw it out and send somebody to pump more.

Only two or three schools where Elsie taught had any playground equipment, and that was just a merry-go-round. Mostly they just played ball. They ran a lot of races and just good fun stuff. They all had a good time. The little kids were just as happy as the big ones. It never occurred to the big ones to look down on the little ones, that's what was so neat.

Elsie never did anything at the homes except get up and eat breakfast. If there was a child in the house, and there were many times, she would try to help take care of the baby so mama could cook breakfast and fix her lunch. Lunches were very, very poor. The kids today would throw them out. Elsie would have too, if she could have done any better. There was nothing fresh ever, except in the fall there would be fresh tomatoes. All the lunches were alike so nobody ever thought anything of it. The kids, who had mothers who cooked and made cookies, often brought Elsie cookies, or a piece of cake, or some other treat.

Elsie's day usually began at 6:00 AM. It wasn't easy getting ready for school when you were living in somebody else's small house. Sometime there were as many as five in the family. All they had to wash in was a wash basin just like at school. It was not private. The wash basin was in the kitchen. Everybody had to take their turn getting ready for school, which was no big joy. It was just that way and they didn't think much about it. After breakfast Elsie would get dressed, walk to school, and build the fire. She swept the floors and cleaned the blackboards at night before she left. She brought coal and kindling in the night before. When there were children of the household in school they wanted to walk with her. Two or three times she lived in a home

where some of the children were her students. It worked great except for one time when she was staying with a Bohemian family. He was a Bohemian, she was not. She was a former school teacher in Kingman county. They had two little children. They had a little boy in the first grade and the girl hadn't started yet. He walked with Elsie to school. One day they were walking and he asked a question about something and Elsie said, "Yes, God did that." He asked, "What do you mean God did that?" Elsie replied, "You know about God don't you?" He said, "No, I never heard about God. Where does he live?" Elsie immediately thought, here this boy was six years old and he's never heard of God. Evidently his parents didn't want him to know about God. And that really put her on the spot. She just told him briefly who God was and left it at that. He went home and told his folks he wanted to know more about God. They told her they wished she would not impose her beliefs on their children. That was as near to a reprimand as she ever got. They got along fine after that. This was a touchy situation Elsie found in several schools, because there were not many churches in the area. Many of the parents had never gone to a church and simply didn't know about God. Some didn't care to know. Later when Elsie went back to Raymond for the second time they had a church in Rago. Then nearly all the children went to church. Many times those first years she ran into people who didn't know about God, yet they all knew enough to pray the Lord's Prayer. School opened every morning by saying the flag salute and the Lord's Prayer. The students just rattled them off, but Elsie found out a lot of them didn't have any idea what they were praying.

After she built the fire the kids started coming. They would get there early. They were glad to get away from home. They would just come up, cluster around, and would all chatter

until time for school to start. Elsie never had to ring a bell or anything she would just say, "It is nine o'clock," and everybody would go to their seats. They would say the flag salute, the Lord's Prayer, and then school would start. She started with first grade reading. They would come up and sit on the recitation bench to do their reading. Then second grade and so on down the line. A new class started about every 15 minutes. After reading came geography and arithmetic. Elsie put problems on the board and all the kids would watch, even the ones that weren't in that class. She could tell that some in the back who were supposed to be studying, were watching. They knew the answers and would shake their head.

The pupils had a little recess in the morning and another one in the afternoon. They were supposed to use that time to go to the bathroom. They were very conscientious. Elsie hardly ever had anyone have to leave the room. At noon they all ate together. In the winter they sat on the south side of the building. They all had their coats on and everyone was leaning up against the building in two rows. The big ones were in the back and the little kids in front, all sitting there with their lunch buckets eating lunch. That was a good time because everybody jabbered and talked. They would start the afternoon with music. Elsie had music every day. They learned all kinds of wonderful songs. At Christmas time they had a beautiful program. They had curtains that they would stretch across the front of the room. They didn't usually have a piano but Elsie could sing and they could sing. Elsie's boyfriend, who lived in Cunningham, played Santa Claus the first two years she taught. That was such a thrill for Elsie. It was such a fun thing for the kids too. They would say, "Miss Crow, is that your boyfriend?" After the programs Elsie furnished the treats, the school board didn't. They had candy and nuts in a paper sack. Nothing fancy but

still a big hit. All the kids brought Elsie presents. She still has a dresser scarf that the kids in that first school gave her. The children drew names so everybody got two presents, one from teacher and one from a different person.

One afternoon, Elsie planned this in advance, she had everybody get in the car. Its a wonder their folks would let her drive, because all of her students went. They crowded in that car and went up to the fish hatchery at Pratt. They ate their lunches and took a big tour of the place and then they went back home. Elsie would do things like that occasionally, take them some place to see something in that car, and their parents would let them go. She would pack 12 or 13 kids in the car. They were little and didn't care if they were crowded. It was fun. Another time they went to see an old depot that was going to be moved. That's the kind of things they did for fun, but not too often.

Elsie's students didn't have to take tests. They just kept working on something until they got it and then moved on. To graduate, the eighth graders had to go to Kingman and take the county examination. People said how awful the country schools were but they never went to one. If it was facts you wanted, and that's what it was in those days. That and whatever moral things you could get from your teacher, you could get all that from a country school. The reason they learned more facts than the other schools was because every child listened to every class. Since the school house was just a little old room and they could hear every word that went on. Three different years Elsie's eighth grade students got the highest grades in the county even competing against those who had gone to town schools. So they do get knowledge. When they passed they were notified there would be a graduation for rural schools in Kingman on such and such a date.

That's where every kid in the country schools went and they had a graduation service. By the time Elsie taught her second time at Raymond School they had a high school there. Then they had the graduation service in the Adams School gymnasium. Elsie's graduates, along with the surrounding schools got to go to Adams for graduation. That's the only service they had.

They started on the first Monday in September and got out when they completed exactly 32 weeks of school. All of Elsie's schools always had a big party the last day of school. That's the only time when everybody brought in a covered dish. They came early and didn't have any school that day. Everybody just came early and they always played baseball. Then they ate, hugged each other, and went home.

They didn't do a lot of art. Elsie didn't know how and the students didn't either. She had no equipment, except drawing paper and crayons. So they really didn't spend much time on art. Elsie's schools spent a lot of time on music. They also spent a lot of time on poetry. They learned ever so many poems. Elsie also read a lot, she had a book all the time. Like most teachers did, Elsie read to her students in the afternoon. She would read a chapter out of a book. They were good books. She read the Wizard of Oz, and others they hadn't heard before.

The last year Elsie taught was in 1946, and it was still in the dust bowl days. They called them the dirty thirties but in 1946 it was still dirty there. One day the dirt got so bad out there at that school they couldn't see anything. They had no light of course, never had any lights. Elsie doesn't remember even a lantern or lamp in school. It got so bad they were all afraid. Elsie lived 2.5 miles from school and had a car there, but she didn't dare try to take the children home. They didn't know what to do but they trusted that they would be taken care of. Sure enough before

noon here came the parents one by one, some of them came in their car, some of them walked, and by 2 o'clock in the afternoon all the children had been taken home and it was nearly pitch dark. It was so dark Elsie didn't dare start home. Somebody offered to take Elsie home but she didn't feel right about it because it was so dangerous. After a while the door opened and it was her husband and Ed Raleigh. Ed was their neighbor. He had a wagon and a team of horses. They came with a team of horses because they thought it was safer traveling that way. They put hay in the bottom of the wagon and had a great big quilt. They got Elsie in the back and covered her up with the quilt and headed home. It was just absolutely terrible. Eula had gone to put something away and Elsie went in the house by herself. She opened the door and Eula had a Coleman lantern hanging up so there was light in the house. The dirt was every where and so thick. Eula took his finger, and wrote Elsie a note in the dirt on the floor. As she went in the door that note was the first thing she saw. It said "Don't worry I'll help you clean it up". There was no school the next day. By that time people had telephones and the school board called school off. The women of the district got together and helped clean up the school house. That was as dirty as you could get. That was just one day. That was an experience Elsie will never forget, and hopes never to see again.

When Elsie started teaching a lot of her students were almost as old as she was. Elsie was very young when she started. Country school teachers were either very young or were an old maid. There were many teachers who couldn't fit in any other place in life, but they could teach in a country school. There were a lot of them. They never did marry and they never took part in

anything. Elsie was sure their recollections weren't as happy as her's. They just didn't seem to belong. Elsie felt sorry for them.

They had teachers meetings in Kingman during the summer. They went to teachers institute for two or three days. Elsie was a president of the Kingman county teachers association. The county superintendent told them about new laws, new books, and the like. The teachers never picked out the books. They didn't have anything to say about them. They were prescribed by the county. Not even the local school board had a voice. Teachers didn't get to pick the books; however, Elsie thought they always had good ones. They didn't change them very often because nobody could afford to buy them. The school kids got to keep the old books. Elsie still had some of her old books. Everything in those books taught a moral. A student didn't have to be smart enough to figure it out either. It was always written at the end of the story.

There was no problem with dating then because they weren't old enough. There was no romance. At least Elsie never saw any signs of romance. She didn't have to worry about romance. They didn't sneak out behind the buildings together. Everybody was open and above board with what they did. Elsie does not recall a student that was ever in those schools who has ever been in trouble with the law. They were brought up right. Their folks were strict. There weren't a lot of outside influences on their lives. That's why teachers were so important. Many times a teacher was the only contact with an adult other than their parents. The only time they saw other people was when they would go to town on Saturday night in the wagon and take their cream to the cream station.

Elsie's husband was three years older than her. He went to school down around Zenda. He told her stories about the times. They separated cream from the milk, of course, and Saturday

was the only time they got to go into Zenda. They lived four miles from town. They would load their cream cans and take them to the cream station. That's how they got their grocery money. One day they were going to town and they hit a bump in the road and upset the cream and it all spilled out. Nobody had any money so they just turned around and went back home. That's the kind of lives those children had. Those were the experiences those people had. Another thing that made it different when Elsie taught was several of the children's homes had grandparents in them. When the grandparents were unable to care for themselves they went to live with their families. Eula's maternal grandfather, one of the Farmer's from Pratt county, came to live with them when he could no longer stay alone. Eula said the children adored him. They didn't think that he was a burden. He was a pleasure and a joy. He was someone to wait on. He had first pick of everything. Elsie didn't think either of her children would be too happy if she called them up and wanted to live with them. They were welcome then. Those old people had quite a lot of influence on them. They helped the children with homework. They told them stories of the olden days. Their life was so different then and it was not all bad. It was not all good but it was not all bad. As far as morals were concerned, boy they were different. They didn't know about these other things. Elsie didn't talk about anything like sex. She didn't know anything about it herself at that time. She didn't say anything about stealing or lying. It wasn't a priority. Nobody did it they just knew they couldn't do that. They shared their belongings. If some kid didn't have any lunch, others would share. They were all good kids. Elsie loved it. She wouldn't want to go back to it now, if she had her life to live over again she would do it all over again. She felt so sad that she couldn't go to college. She wanted to so badly but there was no way with eleven children in the family and nobody to support them.

Elsie wasn't sure if it was admiration but she sure had her student's respect. She gets letters from them and they come and take her out to dinner and they relive those old times. They all said that they were so glad they got to go to a country school. The people that went to town schools, where they only had one grade in a room, don't know half of what we know. One student who stayed in contact with Elsie was Kenneth Heapsh, a very prominent lawyer in Wichita. Many of the students who stayed in contact were from the very first year. One of them was named Doris Fox. She had a big family and they were always inviting Elsie down to stay all night. Elsie had her in the seventh and eighth grade. She married and had a family and she lived in Wichita. Twice a year she came out and she went down to Duquoin to get her brother, who was in the first and second grade, and they came up and they took her out to dinner. That was Gene Fox and Doris Fox Vance. There were so many of them that wrote me all the time. One boy in particular was Gaylord Orum. Elsie had him his first four years of school at Waterloo. His dad was on the school board and she loved him very, very much. He moved out to California and got married. He retired in Hemet, California. He started calling Elsie about ten years ago, in 1985. There was never a month gone by and sometimes more often he called her from California. He wanted to know everything about everybody. He told her what he'd been doing. Some of the other kids Elsie had in school were still his buddies. They would go to San Diego and visit the sites. He told her all about their fun. There was one girl that lived in Michigan that wrote twice a year. Another little girl that sent her a card lived in Tucson, Arizona. The boy who didn't know about God called Elsie quite often. He retired in New York City. He married a woman from Germany during the war. He called to see how the world is around here. Elsie loved that contact. She thought about it and that's the difference between the schools now and the schools

then. Country school teachers were so important to their students. Teachers were not that important years later. Students still admired them but they won't ever cherish them all their lives will they? Elsie had one teacher that she stayed in touch with. She was Arderuth Neal, a music teacher when Elsie was a student in high school. Elsie was so shy, so embarrassed, and she felt everything was wrong with her during high school. Mrs. Neal said Elsie had a beautiful voice but it needed training. So this generous lady took Elsie to Wichita and paid for her voice lessons. Mrs. Neal was the only former teacher Elsie remained in contact with. These bonds were not unique to Elsie. She knew other country school teachers that taught, and then for years kept in touch with their students. All they had in the world were each other during those country school days. A lot of times Elsie didn't get to come home on weekends and just stayed with her host family. That was her life. It was so different, and she just loved it. She never did hate to go to school.

The Waterloo school is now a home. Later on they moved another school in and attached it to the existing one and made a big school. Then they closed and someone bought it and it is a private home now. Most of the schools that Elsie taught in were either torn down or they were sold for residences. The last one she taught in, Meade Creek, a man bought it and took it down to Medicine Lodge, Kansas and used it for a lodge out on his lake. Another one of the schools was the Maude school. The Hellar family bought it and tore it down and built their home out of it. Ruby Cushenbery's home, east of Cunningham, is an old school house. The house where Sheldon's used to live, where Dee Mills lives now, was an old school house. They moved them in those days but in the later days they just tore them down. The one at Pleasant Hill was moved into Zenda and attached to their grade school and a library was made out of it.

It was ironic that Elsie lived in a former country school. Elsie's home, the Sunnyview School, was the second school house built in Kingman county. It was originally located two miles south of Zenda. After the school closed the Freund family bought the building. They moved it to a farm south of Cunningham. The interior was remodeled into a two bedroom home. When the Friends' retired they decided to move their home into Cunningham. They constructed a basement and set the house onto it at its present location. At this time the kitchenette, the only exterior modification, was built. The rest of the exterior was left in its original state. Elsie and Eula loved it when they moved in. The home held fond memories for Eula. As a child he had attended school in that very building. He enjoyed showing guests where he sat in school. He would go into the bathroom and say, "Right there was my seat. Right there where the water faucet is in the tub. That's where I sat the last year I went to school there."

Elsie was glad she had that opportunity to teach. In the long run she thought she had a good education anyway.