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Interview with Margaret Brennan

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Margaret Brennan

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CHAPTER II

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Anne: I'm Anne Gilkerson here to interview Margaret Brennan, a one-room school teacher who taught at the Red Grass School in Ford county near Dodge City. Margaret, first let me thank you for allowing me to come in and interview you.

Anne: Margaret, could you give a little bit of your personal history? When you started teaching. .

Margaret: I started teaching in 1949; I taught at Red Grass school for four years. Then, I took a year off and received a Bachelor of Science degree from Fort Hays Bachelor of Science in Ed. I taught at Sacre Heart school, the fifth grade, where I had 54 fifth graders in one room. Then to Montezuma for one year, where I taught high school, Dodge City high school for six years, and then I went to Trinidad, Colorado, where I taught for 23 years, working in every phase of education, administration--what have you. I took a early retirement three years ago because of the health of a family member.

Anne: Margaret, could you tell me how you got into the teaching position at Red Grass School?

Margaret: Well, I had come home from the East and I needed to do something. I've never been very good at counting

roses on wallpaper. My mother was ill and I needed to be at home and I just sort of fell into it. Beulah Barnes Taylor was the county superintendent schools at that time, She was a family friend, she had always wanted me to do something like that. Dean Crawford, who at that time was Dean of Dodge City Community College--that was way before they had a president--wanted me to go into teaching and it just happened by accident.

Anne: Could you relate some of your experiences at the very first of your teaching career?

Margaret: Well, after about the first week I wanted to quit. Because I had heard of one-room schools, because my mother taught in a one-room school in Iowa and New Mexico, about 1906 in that era, so I knew about them and had heard stories about them. But, that's not the same as actually being involved. I simply didn't know what to do. I had no education courses; it was just simply at a time when you could go into the teaching profession; whether, that was good or bad, I don't know. But I think probably some of the very best teachers were fostered at that time. Simply because you had to rely on, well, the old read'n, writin', and arithmetic. I mean that those were essentials. Phonics, I always taught phonics. It was very difficult with grades one through eight;

each one of those students had to receive a full curriculum every day. The most students I had in any one grade, at one time would be three, such as in the fifth grade. Most of the time just one student. One year, I believe, we had students in all eight grades.

But most of the time you had like three students in the fifth grade, two students in the first grade and so on. Of course, you brought those on through. When we had an eighth grade graduate we would have an eighth grade graduation complete with the whole bit. Because I didn't think that those students should be deprived of anything just because of the location of the school, and they were not.

Anne: Oh, that's neat. How did the community react to this?

Margaret: Oh, most supportive!

Anne: Had this been a past practice?

Margaret: Oh, no, no. They had done very little of this.

The school building was a lovely red brick structure. It still stands; it's used now, I believe, as grain storage. There was a full basement that we could use for activities when the weather was bad. The first year I was there, the plumbing facilities were in the yard. We had to have a small visit about that; I just couldn't

handle that, and so the restrooms were moved indoors. But, that was the only major change actually made in the school. It was very well equipped; the board allowed me to purchase whatever materials I wanted to purchase. There was a piano there. We purchased an autoharp because of folk song type things. I thought that is an excellent way to teach nursery rhymes, what have you. That was used a great deal.

Anne: In visiting with you earlier, Margaret, you indicated that you gave the students music lessons--piano lessons?

Margaret: Yes, I did. We would do this after school; we would divide them up and, say, on Monday there would be three. If there were brothers and sisters in class, that family would have their music lesson on that evening. I gave them a full half hour music lesson. When I think back on it, it's a wonder I didn't kill all of us.

Anne: You also mentioned that they put on some plays. Could you go into that a little bit?

Margaret: Well, sometimes we wrote our little skits, sometimes we used a little playlet from published companies; such as Dramatic Publishing Company out of Chicago, that produces rather good things of that nature, and the children enjoyed that sort of thing. They wrote

their own little skits. We had a May Day thing every year because of my interest in English literature. I've always been interested in that connection and we always had a May fete. They remember those things. Again because of the influence of my mother, we kept a lot of the old fashioned holidays such as May Day, Arbor Day, what have you.

Anne: What did you do special for Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Margaret: Oh, Christmas we had a full blown production. We did the "Littlest Angel." We always had a lot of things; we always had a Santa Claus come out and it was a big community thing. Community, I say, this included Spearville, Wright, as far away as Kinsley. Of course, the students there had family in Dodge City and surrounding areas. We would have a full house, always.

It was heated by an oil burning stove. Very large oil burning stove.

Anne: That was up until the school closed?

Margaret: Yes, until the school closed, I was there four years, as I've said.

Anne: Were you responsible for, on a daily base, coming in and opening the school and closing it?

Margaret: Oh, yes.

Anne: Were you also:

Margaret: Janitor work, the whole thing, I did the whole bit. Now the school board and just members around would come in and help me do a thorough, cleaning such as scrubbing the floors, waxing the floors that sort of thing. I would do it occasionally, but they were very good about that--coming in and really giving everything a thorough cleaning at least twice a year. Which was very good.

Anne: In your typical day, Margaret, I would kind of like to know how you went about organizing for students, one through eight, and kept your sanity.

Margaret: Well, I probably didn't, Anne--probably what my problem is. I've always identified with Woodstock in Peanuts because he always flies backwards. Actually, it was rather simple. I worked out a lesson plan, a basic floor plan as it were. The important thing was to be sure each individual had something to do, not just busy work either, not coloring or anything like that. We had art, but that was during a definite art period. That was one thing that we all had together--we all had music--singing. That was one thing we all did together. Sometimes for a program we would use the recess periods, the lunch hour. Not all of the lunch hour, of course; they would have their lunch

but then they wouldn't go out to play. We would practice, instead. This was never forced; this was something they wanted to do. I think that students are oriented; they're success oriented just as the rest of us are. When they feel comfortable with what they are doing, you have no difficulty with encouraging this type of thing.

Anne: Did you have the students help one another as what they would call peer tutoring now?

Margaret: Very little of that, very little of that actually, because, you see, when I started to teach at the school, they were way behind their grade levels, way, way behind. Some of them had some natural math ability. That is probably my weakest subject, something that I work to keep up with, always, and in English and writing. The first thing in the morning, say, for instance, I would assign, depending on the grade level, an essay, something of that nature, some math problems that they were to work there. They had homework also, I believe in homework. They would bring their homework. Then I would teach, say, for instance, first grade reading at that particular time when other people were busy writing, working with math problems, reading a chapter in history, doing a little science project, a little experiment. It was very much hands on.

That school, as you can see from the painting there, it's a beautiful school. There were three rooms on the ground level; two of the rooms, one was a very large entrance hall and then one was a sort of a recreation room, we had a sand table in it. I've noticed, since I've been doing my little child development thing, again here by accident, that water tables and sand tables, bean tables; this is a big thing. I used that then, very, very extensively. Weights and measures--all kinds of things.

Ann: Could you explain to me what a sand table, or a water table, or a bean table is?

Margaret: Well, it's simply, the one I'm using now. It's simply a frame of wood and it has a plastic container in it with a plug in the bottom and you can fill it with water, sand, whatever, and drain it through the bottom. This was simply a wooden structure; we put a very large old white porcelain sink in for the water table type thing. It's simply a matter of motor development in early childhood training. Also, you can use this for teaching resistance in mathematics--that sort of thing.

Anne: Okay, I had never heard of one and so I find that interesting that they used them then and apparently

they are coming back into:

Margaret: Well, they were not commonly used then; well the sand table was, yes, but then that was something that I preferred to use. I've done always a lot of reading since I've started to teach. I thought that was very necessary to find out what I was doing, since I didn't know originally.

Anne: That is very interesting. Let's see, you have mentioned that it was a three-room school, were you and the students always in the same locale or were some of them in other rooms?

Margaret: Most of the time we were in the same locale. There would be times when I would have one grade or the other go into the room which had double doors. But those doors were always open.

Anne: And then they were working individually?

Margaret: Oh yes, they were working individually, and I think that's the important thing, with the one room school. Why, it was a valuable source of training, both for students and for myself, particularly. Because you had to make a conscious effort. Time never hung heavy on one's hands. Absolutely not! Also, I think that there were fewer discipline problems. Because, I can never remember having a discipline problem in those four years. I honestly can never remember that.

Anne: Do you think that was because the children were so interested in what they were doing or part of their background?

Margaret: I think it was a number of things. I think it was part of their rural background. I think it was support of the parents, who were not all that enthusiastic at first, because, as I mentioned, they were behind their grade levels. But I had parent teacher conferences the very first thing, and as I explained to you, I had their papers and I showed them where the problems were, what problems needed to be worked on; they were most supportive. I think it was their rural background; I think it was parent support; I think it was interest of the students; I think a lot of it was my own enthusiasm. And it was just sort of being at the right place at the right time.

Anne: Okay, did the students start school at about five years of age?

Margaret: Yes.

Anne: So you would have had what we would consider:

Margaret: Yes, kindergarten.

Anne: So you had kindergarten through the eighth grade.
Wow!

Margaret: Well, actually, you see, it was the first grade.
They were five years old.

Anne: As far as discipline, you mentioned that you had no problems, and you have several good causes for that. What would you have done if you had a discipline problem?

Margaret: What I have always done--just cope with it. Deal with the individual involved. If that did not work, ask for parental support. Just deal with it as I have always just done. I have never had much of a problem with discipline, just very rarely.

Anne: Was it kind of equally balanced male--female, the student population?

Margaret: Yes, most of the time.

Anne: You also mentioned in giving music lessons that some of the boys participated.

Margaret: Oh, yes!

Anne: Did they all or just certain ones participate?

Margaret: No, they all did. Now some, that was not their bag. But they all learned to read notes and, here again, this was something that was not forced. This was something that they wanted to do, that they enjoyed. We had a drum, as I recall, a couple of drums and the autoharp. It was an expressive form; something that they could express themselves with.

Anne: I think that probably contributed quite a bit to their good feeling towards the school.

Margaret: Well, yes, it was their school. I think this is

very, very important. It was something that they were doing, that they were interested in; it was something they had to do anyway. If you have to do it, you might as well enjoy it. While we all enjoy some aspects more or less than others, still that's important for them to be aware of, to be aware of learning. That's something that, I think, I was able to impart, again quite by accident. To be aware of learning, to be aware of the world around you.

Anne: Were most of these students from a small location near Dodge City? None of them actually came from Dodge City, proper.

Margaret: No, none actually came from Dodge City. They were in the area around the school: Wright, Spearville, those areas contributed.

Anne: Okay, so you would have had anywhere from around 24 to 30 students approximately.

Margaret: Oh no, no, no. The most we had was, let's see, maybe twenty.

Anne: Twenty at the most at one time.

Margaret: It's been awhile ago, Anne.

Anne: Also, do you feel like the students treated themselves and each other with greater respect?

Margaret: Yes, I believe so, yes, I believe so. And there again, that could come from their rural background,

that could come from....Also, the school was kind of the focus of their lives, you see, rather than splintered into a million different directions.

Anne: I can see where that would be the case. Margaret, how did the students get to school?

Margaret: Their parents brought them most of the time, a few could walk. The John Slattery family was just down the road.

Say, oh, maybe four city blocks.

I also stayed there part of the time because when I first started to teach at Red Grass, I couldn't drive. I never had to drive; I'd lived where it wasn't necessary; public transportation. There I was at 24 years old learning to drive. I stayed at the John Slattery residence.

That was another thing that we would do after school; take teacher out and teach her to drive. After that first year, I stayed at home in Dodge City and drove back and forth. So I wasn't the only one who learned!

Anne: Yeah, it sounds like it. I'll bet they found that unique, teaching a teacher!

Margaret: Yes, yes and I think that that helped to cement relationships, too. They couldn't believe that there was anyone because, you see, in a rural setting everyone learns to drive. Like at three

months. It's necessary; they can drive anything with wheels on it. There I was; that was just a skill I had never acquired. Everyone contributed to it; they were all very helpful. I went and purchased a car and had to have the garage man drive me home.

Anne: Well, that's kind of getting the car before the:

Margaret: That's right! That's right!

Anne: Oh, neat! There wasn't a school bus or anything of this nature?

Margaret: No, oh no, nothing of that nature. Oh no.

Anne: At that time most families would have had their own cars.

Margaret: Yes, oh yes.

Anne: You see I'm showing my lack of knowledge here.

Margaret: Yes, oh yes. Well, you see this was in 49, that's been awhile ago. It was after the War, it was before; two, three, four or five cars in a family. But it was....

Anne: Did the father usually drive the students or were the mothers also driving at that time?

Margaret: Both, depending on the time of the year. If the men were busy in the fields, the women would drive.

Anne: In the interview, so far, you have mentioned a school board. Where were they located?

Margaret: Their children attended the school and just in the farming area around. ~I'll never forget them; Paul

Zurbucken, John Slattery and Howard Mann.

Anne: So you had three board members.

Margaret: Un, huh, and I have no idea how they were, you know, I really don't know, how they were elected or selected. I would assume it was a voting process within the community.

Anne: Okay. Then, they had one teacher in the school. Did they do the interviewing?

Margaret: Yes, un huh.

Anne: So, you actually interviewed with the school board?

Margaret: Yes and Beulah Mae Barnes.

Anne: The county superintendent?

Margaret: Un huh, Beulah Mae Barnes Taylor was there.

Anne: Alright, now she was from...

Margaret: Dodge City.

Anne: The Ford county area:

Margaret: The Ford County.

Anne: So you interviewed with her and the school board. So was the Red Grass school under the supervision of, like, the Ford county?

Margaret: No, it was strictly the county superintendent had control of the school; 443 was not involved.

Anne: I knew that we had county superintendents. Could you tell me a little bit about what they did?

Margaret: Just simply supervised the schools in the county. I remember there was a school in Edwards County,

also. I can't recall the lady's name; she was an older lady, probably about my age now. She had taught in rural schools, I guess, all of her life and preferred to teach that way. She was an excellent teacher. I learned a great deal from her, from her suggestions, her thoughts and so forth. She was a good example.

Anne: Were there any personal expectations of you? Like, I have heard, you were expected to not date or this type thing.

Margaret: Oh no, no.

Anne: Was that way past?

Margaret: No, no. I did interview for a school and I won't use the name of the school, the town, or the superintendent. But I did interview for a school where I couldn't believe that interview. I simply could not believe that interview, the questions I was asked.

Anne: What did they ask?

Margaret: Oh, whether you would date or not, did you dance, did you drink, did you smoke, what your religion was. I mean, things, that no one would dare ask you now.

Anne: What kind of questions did the board ask you when you interviewed with them?

Margaret: Very little, actually, as I recall; we simply sat

and talked.

Oh, just as I think, another thing that we did at the school; each of the students had a community concert ticket. I brought them to the community concerts. They gave us a special rate, as I recall, a school rate or something. The group attended the community concerts. There again, you see, I don't know if you could even get away with that today or not. I use the term get away with; see that's not, that's not true, either. No, I mean you're not getting away with anything. What you're trying to do is encourage them to develop and to grow. And the kids loved it.

Anne: Now, I think if you would take some of our students to the community concert, they would think you had lost your mind.

Margaret: Oh right! I think so! Because in Trinidad we always had tickets available to attend the community concert. But very few did.

Anne: Do you think that's because we don't understand the purpose of it and people tend to think that's a highbrow activity?

Margaret: Well, yeah, I think so, and at that time, you see this was before television actually. This was before.... So you can't really compare it now, not really. Because there were different; they did not

have the pressures students have now. And again, being in a rural community, they simply....

Anne: Did you have any students, that you know of, who went to Red Grass, who have done any outstanding things?

Margaret: Oh yes. Nancy Mann Trauer has been mayor of Dodge City. A very, very special person. They've married, gone into farming, and they have all certainly, as far as I know, had happy, successful lives. I see them often, you know, we run into each other and they'll call occasionally.

Anne: They stop in and see you.

Margaret: Yes, oh yes.

Anne: How many of them went on to college, do you know?

Margaret: I would say half of them: I would say half of them did.

Anne: That's a pretty high rate.

Margaret: Yes. Received at least a, I believe, an Associate of Arts degree in some area or attended a trade school, something of comparable.

Anne: Do you have any idea of what it would have cost to send the kids to Red Grass school?

Margaret: You know I don't actually; I don't think it cost anything.

Anne: It was state supported.

Margaret: Yes, oh yes, my goodness yes. We had to adhere to

very strict state standards. That was also something that I enjoyed because I wasn't aware of that before, you see. I'd no notion. I'd attended teachers' meetings like crazy; that was when you had them the first of November. I always went to Topeka. Attended every single meeting. Of course, I in late years recovered from that! As most of us do, but no, I think, that when there are worthwhile meetings and programs. I'm just sitting here now, recollecting, just sitting there taking notes just like crazy.

Anne: It was gospel.

Margaret: Oh! Oh, oh! According to, you know. My! The Bible according to!

Anne: Do you think that the nature of the teachers meeting has changed over the years?

Margaret: Yes, I think so, I definitely think so. I think, perhaps not as instructive as they were. Not as, and maybe this is unfair to say, I really don't know because I've been out of teaching for three years, but I think teachers' meetings used to be fun things to attend. Very instructive and, I think, now it's considered kind of a pain, isn't it?

Anne: The ones that I have attended I was disappointed in.

Margaret: Yes, I think that's true. I think that's very true.

Anne: The first one I went to, I went with the

anticipation of getting new techniques and new ideas. And I really felt like it was more of a place for people to sell textbooks and...

Margaret: Yes, I think, that very definitely is true; that things are pushed now. I can remember early on the ones that I attended, as I say, I went to Topeka because I thought that that was the source. There were a few representatives of textbooks, of teaching materials and so forth. I can remember just being, just so excited with this stuff and coming home with just piles of things. Very, very useful, I think. We used to meet with each other and discuss methods; discuss things like that.

Anne: Were there a lot of lectures or this type thing over methods?

Margaret: There were, un huh, there were, there really were. There would be different levels, different things that you could attend at different times of the day. Most enjoyable and most instructive. Actually, it was like, well, today you could get college credit for it, I'm sure. If you could authenticate what you had done.

Anne: I find that different programs like on effective learning and mastery learning are much more beneficial now than going to the state conference. I'm disappointed in them.

Margaret: Yes, many times, I think one is. I know, oh, the last few years that I taught, it seemed like the nature had changed.

Anne: Were the students required to attend school until they were sixteen or until completing the eighth grade?

Margaret: Oh yes.

Anne: So that standard really hasn't changed?

Margaret: Oh, that standard hasn't changed, no, and then, of course, they all went on to high school. Though, in my mother's day, of course, that was....

Anne: They didn't really have a cut off period?

Margaret: Oh no! Oh my, no. In rural Iowa, for a male to be able to graduate from the eighth grade was just unheard of. Because when my mother started teaching school, she was 17 and had what was called a normal school certificate, and she had students 23, 24.

Anne: Did she ever relate that she had some problems along those lines?

Margaret: Oh yeah, she would laugh about some of the things that would occur. But, knowing my mother, I doubt that she had a discipline problem.

Anne: In other words, she would set them straight quickly.

Margaret: Right! Right, I think she could handle the situation.

Anne: Well, you know, you hear that they had students that

were so much older and they tended to be a problem and be disruptive.

Margaret: Yes, un huh. Principally because they couldn't read. They could see no point in being there. I remember my mother telling about one young man who had a primer and his hand would, he was so large, his hand would wrap clear around the primer. I thought, whoa! Don't disagree with that one.

Anne: So, would they challenge her authority as a teacher? Did she ever share that?

Margaret: No, I don't think so. Because, there again, that was 1906. While they might get into trouble with themselves, they would scuffle in the school yard and that sort of thing, the teacher was absolute law. There would be no sassing of the teacher. It would be very rare.

Anne: That's changed a little bit!

Margaret: Oh just a smap, yes.

Anne: Just enough that you might notice it.

Margaret: Just a winsy tinsy, yes. A student might say, oh mercy, I don't want to do that.

Anne: Now, they might say I won't do that.

Margaret: Right!

Anne: Let's see, you were the only one in your school.

Margaret: Right.

Anne: You mentioned over by, on the way to Minneola that

they had two teachers in that school.

Margaret: Yes, un huh, and I think sometimes three. There was a principal and I cannot remember, though I can see the lady's face: she's still living and I know her very well... Florence Scott, Florence Scott, yes. Was a teacher at the school and principal.

Anne: She served a dual purpose.

Margaret: Yes.

Anne: Did you have an opportunity to share information back and forth with these other teachers?

Margaret: Yes, we would call each other; we would meet regularly. In fact, we had little teacher' meetings of our own.

Anne: Could you tell me about how many people participated from different schools?

Margaret: Oh, there would be, as I say, the one lady from Edwards County. Oh, I don't know, now from the rural schools, I suppose, about six. But then there were schools, say, for instance, Ford and so forth and we would get together with these people, too. Sort of a county type thing.

Anne: County type thing and then did you get together like on different procedures or?

Margaret: Yes, yes, we would discuss procedures; we would discuss philosophy, ideas, that sort of thing.

Anne: How did you go about selecting textbooks and and

different materials that you used?

Margaret: Well, that was hilarious. There were sort of remnants of some textbooks when I came--and Beulah Barnes, of course, you got those from the county superintendent. Those were selected. Then, she would allow you also to select things on your own. When you would go to meetings, if there was a book that I really, really liked, I would bring it back and we would go over it and substitute. And this, of course, had to be subject to state approval, too.

Anne: I don't think that we're required state approval. It kind of goes through a committee type thing.

Margaret: Yes, it does and each individual school, each individual situation. I'm sure they would have trusted me if I had wanted to completely change the curriculum. After the first year, whatever I'd wanted to do. I'm sure they would have had no problem.

Anne: And you didn't have to get board approval. You just went over it with the county superintendent.

Margaret: Right, but I did always get board approval. I would always....

That board was exceptional, I realize now. I didn't realize it then because I didn't know much about boards. But those three gentlemen, two of them particular, those three gentlemen were

exceptional.

Anne: That's fantastic. Do you think that by meeting state requirements maybe we had a more solid basis of curriculum; everybody learned the same?

Margaret: Yes and I don't think it was lock step either. I don't think, I certainly don't think it was that sort of thing. Because, each individual teacher gives his or her own individual stamp; to whatever you're teaching, whatever you're doing. I think, we've become so afraid of everyone learning the same thing at the same rate of speed, at the same time that we've gotten a little, maybe, a little paranoid on that.

Anne: With all the criticism of education I feel like, now, this is my own personal belief, that maybe we need to go back to very basic requirements and allowing the schools and the teachers to expand on this.

Margaret: Yes, I think so. That you need to: When you enter college you need to have certain skills. Having taught in college for many years, this is the exception rather than the rule. Some students come in exceptionally well prepared and some students, it's almost frightening.

Anne: I would agree with that. With my own children I feel like they missed some things in science that, I

felt like they should have had.

Margaret: Well, yes, I think so. Then, of course, that's been one of the main criticisms of the smaller schools. That they do not have the things that they should have. Well, I don't think that has anything to do with the size of the school. I think it has to do with the quality of the instruction. If that school can hire qualified people and pay them a salary, for instance, Anne, I made a 170 dollars a month when I started to teach school. I can not believe that!

Anne: Do you feel like that was in line with the wages of other people?

Margaret: Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes, in fact that was higher than some.

Anne: Higher than some. I would say that's still somewhat true of teachers' salaries. Would you agree that we're still somewhat better than the average but not as well paid as we should be?

Margaret: Oh, I agree. Oh yes, yes.

I have always been very impressed by the fact that my hair dresser has to pass a state board. Now she's very important to me. I am very fond of her. She messes with the outside of my head. I, who mess with the inside of peopel's heads, I don't have to pass a state board. And, I find that scary.

Anne: Yes, it is. So, do you think that maybe we need some type of....

Margaret: I don't know, Anne. We've discussed this pro and con. We've talked about it--who sets up these things in Colorado. Of course, we have the test now. I don't know if you do in Kansas.

Anne: Yes, we do.

Margaret: The test that you take in order to qualify. I think this is very good if it is a legitimate thing.

Anne: Margaret, you referred to you made a 100 or 172 dollars a month. Would you care to share the difference in that beginning salary to your ending salary?

Margaret: Oh, Oh, Considerable!

Anne: Considerable.

Margaret: A whole bunch!

Anne: Okay, so you taught at Trinidad Community College.

Margaret: Yes, well it's a state school.

Anne: A state school, okay.

Margaret: It's not a community college. It's a state school.

Anne: How would that compare with like Dodge City Community College?

Margaret: Well, the same except that it's--we are under the state Board of Education.

Anne: Under the state Board of Education rather than the Board of Regents.

Margaret: Yes, un huh. We have our own board.

Anne: I am kind of curious. Is it kind of a vocational school or a two year program?

Margaret: Well, we have two, three year and four year programs. Trinidad has the world's largest and best gunsmithing school, for instance. In Colorado, and I like this, the academic and vocational are under the same roof. For instance, the vocational people are required to take a certain amount of academic credits, Math, English and, of course, that's a very sore point. Especially, say with the gunsmiths. Many of whom are retired military personnel. Who are interested in armament and there they make guns from scratch. From a piece of metal and a hunk of wood. And they do everything themselves. It is quite a wonderful program. But a lot of these people are like 45 upwards years old. And they really object and many of them have been, well, officers and so forth and for them to take freshman English, just about caused a third world war. But we were able to work through that and they were very....we also had a course in technical English which taught the technical aspect; descriptive writing not regular English or purple sunset as it is know as, but the definite specific writing of instructions.

Anne: Now, I've never heard that description, purple sunset. Could you expand on that a little bit?

Margaret: The soft white fluffy angora pussy cat reclined upon the steps of the old antebellum mansion as the sun sank into the west. Technical writing is; the little sucker sat on the steps.

Anne: Getting back to the one-room school, Margaret, did you negotiate for your own salary or did they just tell you what they were going to pay you on a yearly basis?

Margaret: They just told me what they would pay. When I left I was making like \$350.00 a month, which was unheard of at that time. People in high school, were not making that kind of money.

Anne: I would say that was a very good indication of how they felt about you as a teacher. Did they bring the check to you, did they mail it?

Margaret: No, they just simply brought it. Someone when they brought the kids would bring it. It would be Paul Zurbucken.

Anne: Just on a certain day.

Margaret: Paul usually brought it. There was a president of the board, secretary and treasurer, I'm sure, but I don't have any idea now.

Anne: Do you have any idea how they determined what they were going to pay you? They just discussed it

and....

Margaret: Well, I think just what they could afford.

Anne: That's very good. When the students enrolled, did they have to pay a tuition like we do at Dodge?

Margaret: You know, I really am embarrassed to admit that I can't remember what that was. I don't know if there was a county assessment and I'm embarrassed about that, but I really can't, I'm not sure. I am not sure. I would imagine that there was a fee per student.

Anne: Now, when I was going to school, we bought our own books. Did your students buy their own books or did they rent them from the school?

Margaret: I believe either they were provided by the school district...and there again, you see that's been so long ago that I really, it's one of those things I'm not certain about. But I'm almost certain that they were provided by the school district.

Anne: The school was in existence when you started teaching. Do you know any of the history, how it came to be constructed?

Margaret: Well, it was quite an old school. Brick construction, very solid and, as you can see from the painting, the belltower and the whole bit. It was really an exceptional school. It had been there, oh, for many, many years.

Anne: Do you, just through curiosity, did you find out if somebody donated the land or was it purchased by the county?

Margaret: Again, I don't know. I'm sure that it was originally donated, I'm sure. As I recall, I think the construction was, at least partially, by members of the community--by the group.

Anne: Margaret, when you left, was that the last year that Red Grass School was open?

Margaret: Yes, un huh.

Anne: Could you go into a little bit of the history and how you felt about the closing of the school?

Margaret: The school was going to have to close. The board and I, we were very close friends, I mean we, the whole group, we got along well together. This discussion was made as to what I wanted to do. Well, I had decided after 4 years that I would return to school and get a degree in education. I needed a year to do that and to complete all the education courses that I wanted. The requirements, of course, were a little different then. I took everything that I could take. I think, well, as I recall, we just simply talked it over and it was going to have to close in a couple of years anyway because they were phasing out, the county superintendent. They were phasing out the one-room

school and they were very nice about what did I want to do, what were my feelings, that I was welcome to stay as long as I wanted to stay. But how did I feel about it and after talking it over, I just decided that was a good year 1954 or 55...that was an excellent year to start or to finish the education. Fort Hays was close and Dr. Geneva Herndon taught at Hays at that time--and Dr. Stark. There were many, many people there that I knew...Harriett Ketchum, that I knew and enjoyed. So, that was the logical place for me to go. Though I did consider many others.

Anne: While you were teaching at the one-room school were you, in fact, taking any classes?

Margaret: No, I would take some classes in the summertime.

Anne: In the summer and you did this to help prepare yourself?

Margaret: Yes, un hun, to help prepare myself and the 60 hour certificate was very easily renewable. But, I simply, well not to sound like goody two shoes, but I needed--I did need to know things.

Anne: Now, did you have the 60 hour teaching certificate when you started teaching at Red Grass?

Margaret: Yes, un huh, I got that.

Anne: And then it took you a year to complete your training with additional hours during the summer.

So do you have any idea how many total number of credits were required then?

Margaret: Oh gee, you know, again, I don't have any idea. I know you could...there was the 60 hour certificate which meant that you could teach coming out of junior college.

Anne: Was that kind of a standard not only for the one-room school but also for like your regular community schools like here in Dodge City?

Margaret: Yes, I believe so, well now, perhaps not in Dodge City. But, I know in the smaller towns around there were people teaching with the 60 hour certificates. Especially in elementary.

Anne: Maybe not so much in high school and....

Margaret: I don't believe so much in high school, but I believe there were some.

Anne: Can you give me a little bit of information on the life time teaching certificate? Is that the same as the 60 hour?

Margaret: Oh no, no. That requires certain hours, a degree, of course, I'm talking about, say almost 30 years ago, see. The certificate and the requirements would be very different now. But I know a bachelors was required at least six hours of experience that sort of thing.

Anne: So to have a lifetime certificate you did in fact

have to have a bachelor's degree.

Margaret: Oh yes, oh yes, un huh.

Anne: Now that clears a misunderstanding up for me because I thought that people who had the lifetime certificate did not in fact have a degree.

Margaret: Well, I think there are some and this would have been several years ago, you see. I think there were some who have lifetime certificates who perhaps did not have, who taught with the 60 hour certificate and transmitted it, transmitted it into a lifetime, meeting the further requirements that the lifetime asked for. I'm positive of that.
teaching and....

Anne: Well, I think, you have very fond memories of your teaching and....

Margaret: Oh yes I do, oh yes they were four very happy years. Very difficult years and, of course, you see to drive that 17 miles. It was 17 miles to the school and the last 7 miles, I'm sure, at least were unpaved road...and not knowing how to drive. Today I'm a pretty good mudder, because I learned to drive on muddy roads, wet roads, slick roads.

Anne: What kind of hours, when would you actually start your school day?

Margaret: About 8 o'clock and I was always there by 7:30-usually by 7:00. Particularity in the winter time to turn up the

heating and to get everything ready for the next day, or for that day. And usually I had everything pretty well ready when I left the school. Never ever left before 5:00 o'clock.

Anne: Was that pretty standard of people who taught in a one-room school?

Margaret: Well, I don't know. I would imagine so. I'm not sure, but I would imagine so.

Anne: Of course, I don't think many of them gave piano lessons after school. But maybe they did stay and work with:

Margaret: Yes, oh yes. And that was another thing that I did. Now, the piano lessons would, I can't remember how many evenings a week that took—two I'm sure. Then I would stay and tutor, stay and help and, of course, that is a tremendous amount of papers to check every day. Wow, you see for every subject, every... and that's why checking papers has never especially bothered me, kind of early training.

Anne: Do you feel like the students in a one-room schoolroom had more of a sense of unity and closeness?

Margaret: I believe so, I believe so. I really do. As I recall it in thinking of students today, I think they did and I think they had a very strong sense of self, very strong sense of self worth, ability. They were not actually comparing themselves to anyone, they were comparing themselves to themselves.

Anne: Well, Margaret I thank you for your time and I think
this has been absolutely fascinating.

Margaret: Oh well, thank you. That's; I've enjoyed it, if there's
anything else, I've looked over those questions, and....

Anne: Is there anything you would want to add?

Margaret: No, no.

Anne: Thank you very much!