

A Two-Room School

Kenneth Z. Turner

We have all heard stories about one-room schools. I attended a Two-room school at Pryorsburg, Kentucky. The one we called "The Little Room" cared for the training of children through the fourth grade. The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades proudly sat in "The Big Room." The "Big Room Teacher" was the school principal.

I know there is a lot to be said for consolidation of schools and the specialized courses that are available in them. What is not generally believed is this: There are a lot of things that were learned earlier and easier in our two-room school facility. Some of those disciplines are not learned at all in the more modern facilities.

When I was in the third grade, I learned my assigned work and gave the required recitations. And, I also heard and listened avidly to the fourth graders as they performed. I learned to spell the fourth grade words while still in the third. When I went into the fourth, the entire year was a breeze. It was a bit boring because I had already learned it last year!

When I went into the Big Room and the fifth grade, it was like heaven! I was more than ready for the new studies. Plus, it was incredible to be able to sit there and soak up the knowledge of those next three grades. The fifth was a bit more difficult for me because it was all new, but, by the time I reached the sixth, I had already heard most of it once. By the seventh, I had heard it twice. Also, rehearsing the fifth and sixth recitations served to burn them into my memory so strongly they remain there today.

I competed in the weekly spelling bee every Friday. By the time I was in the sixth, I was third runner-up nearly every time. In the seventh grade, I ended the year in second place, just one word behind the eighth grade champion, Linda Prince. We were both taken to the County Spelling Bee in Mayfield so that Linda could compete and I could watch. All four grades in the room competed in handwriting from the day one entered that room. By the time one finished the eighth, I guarantee you one could and did write a nice "hand."

By the time I reached the eighth grade, it too was easy. It happened that there were only three of us in that class. Many students had to drop out of school earlier than eighth grade for many reasons: The costs (we didn't have free textbooks), but mostly because of the need to become breadwinners and help out at home. John Ray Allison, Billy Saxon and I made up the entire class. We spent much of our time helping children in the grades below us. Even that activity enhanced our overall education.

I know there are a lot of reasons for the larger schools. But, I also know that many good things came of the smaller schools and they should not be held in disdain. We learned to spell quite well, We learned to write well. We learned to read aloud in the presence of other children both younger and older than ourselves. We learned

to co-exist with them. We learned to help them when they were smaller than we were. We never did learn to call them "kids"! Little goats were kids. I still wince when TV personalities talk about "our kids."

It is my personal opinion that the ideal education would be a combination of both types of schools. If students could be placed together as we were in the earlier grades, they would benefit from many of the courtesies and niceties that they are now not learning and being taught. After the eighth grade or so, maybe even after the sixth, they could then be sent off to schools like those we have now. I mean school's having as only a single subject and a single grade level in each room at any one time. Then and there the specializations could be taken up.

Yes, the one-room and two-room schools are things of the past and are held in contempt by a great majority of folk. And, it will always be thus. But the fact remains that the togetherness, the mutual dependence, the shared experiences, the help freely given and freely received, and a dozen other things I could mention brought a depth and meaning to our educations. I have never ceased to be proud of the very small school I attended and to be pleased with the quality of training that was imparted to us by the system.

Fancy Farm, Kentucky

