

“Keep it short and sweet”

Gertrude Campbell

by Cathy Klebba



As I talked with Gertrude Campbell on a snowy, wintery day she kept saying, “Now, Cathy, you just don’t understand how it was then...” I tried to understand Gertrude’s proper enunciation and the kind of teacher she must have been; I tried to understand her feelings when I asked her about the Great Depression and she answered, “No comment”; and I tried to understand when I asked her about dating and she said again, “Cathy, you just don’t understand, we didn’t have money to go on dates or any cars to go in...”

What I did understand by the end of the interview was what a nice, kind, interesting and intelligent person Gertrude Campbell is. We began the interview at the beginning.

“I was born on February 13, 1895, in San Francisco. That was a long time ago. I lived there for just a few years, and then we moved to Chicago. I went through three years of schooling there before we moved to Denver. That was when I was in the fourth grade. I liked it in Denver, because it was a small city. It was different then; I don’t think I would like it now.

“I was out of school quite a lot because my mother was sick. Then when I was 14 my mother

died. My sister was 19, and I had two brothers. My sister went to Chicago, and my brothers were put in an orphanage there. You folks don’t understand how poor we were. When my mother died I worked for people because that’s the only thing I could do to exist. If I were to tell you some of the prices of things you wouldn’t believe it.

“I have spent most of my life in Colorado. After attending North Denver High School I graduated salutatorian of my class. Then I went to Colorado College in Colorado Springs for four years. There I was elected Phi Beta Kappa. I took mostly languages, math and English in college.

“After I graduated I went to Denver to work that summer. Then I got the teaching job here. Lorna Stukey was a classmate of mine in college, and she and I did our French together. The superintendent asked her if she knew anyone who could teach Latin, and that’s how I got the job.

“When I first came here I got \$90 a month for nine months. Mr. Thompson was the superintendent in 1918, and there were only five teachers in high school. We all taught different subjects. I taught English, business English, algebra, geometry and Latin. Then there was an elementary school and four years high school. I taught for two years before I married.

“The war was over in 1918, and during the war you’d be surprised at how few men were in Steamboat. They had all gone to war. I met Arthur one day while tobogganing. He was working as a linotype operator at the Pilot. That was a long time ago, and they don’t have those anymore. My husband and I were married in 1920.”



I asked Mrs. Campbell about living conditions and everyday cost of living during her early days of marriage. “When we were married in 1920, we had rented a house for the summer, and we had to leave because the house was sold. That left us



with nowhere to live, so we lived in a tent until we could find a place to live. The housing shortage is nothing new to Steamboat.

"When we first married the groceries were delivered by horse and wagon to our house. We telephoned in our orders, and the phones were the old crank kind. Our grocery bill was no more than a dollar a day. That was for my husband and me. We did have a garden; many people in town did. We didn't have chickens, but others did.

"Many people didn't have cars. We bought a Chevy in 1925. We had the car about two years, and then we bought this house. We rented first, then we saved a couple hundred dollars, and that was our down payment. Our first house was over on Butcher Knife Creek. Then we sold the car because we could not afford both. We did without a car for five years, but then people walked everywhere anyway.

"Mercy, we didn't have much money. There were a lot who couldn't afford to travel, and many people never went out of Steamboat. There were groups of young people from the church who would have parties together. We went to the picture show and dances and had parties in our homes. We also had dances at the old Cabin Hotel. We walked there and back. This was before the Depression, but no one had any money.

"My son, Bill, was born at the hospital, and my daughter was born at home. My son was the older, and at that time the hospital was where the old junior high school music department was. The upstairs was for patients, and the down-

stairs was the doctor's office. The old hospital was at the Cameo, but that was before Dr. Willett moved it; I never saw that hospital. My son is now retired, and my daughter lives in Aurora.

"Since I had quit teaching when I married and had a family, my son was just ready for the Army when I started teaching again, in 1946. I taught till 1971 when I retired. I was 76 when I retired, and the school had no Latin teacher and no way of getting one. Since I retired they have not been able to find a Latin teacher. I think it's terrible not to have Latin in school today. I think the colleges don't encourage enough languages, especially Latin. They need to urge students to take Latin. I took French, German and Spanish, but I think one is better able to understand the English language if one has taken Latin.

"I always had the students memorize the first paragraph of Ceasar's Gallic Wars in the second year. In fact, David Combs can still recite it. The second year students had to translate it too.

"I had as many as 36 in my Latin class. The old high school is now the old junior high. It was built in 1918. That was the first high school where I taught. All the additions have been put on since, of course. The old elementary school was torn down because it was considered unsafe since it was built in 1911. At one time I had my classes over in room two of the elementary school.

"The students were much as they are today. I think now the schools are probably over-emphasizing athletics, but even in 1918 we did have girl's basketball. They had plays; they had dancing parties; and along that time skiing was just becoming popular. There were church activities also, and we used to toboggan up on the hill. That was a lot of fun."

After exploring how the school days used to be, I asked Mrs. Campbell about her personal philosophies, hobbies and interests today. She replied, "When I quit teaching, I said I did not want to substitute; I also was not going to tutor. A student called and asked if I would tutor him. He just couldn't understand why I would not. After all I felt I had done my bit. I tried, I worked hard, and I enjoyed it, and that was just the way it was.

"I think the youth of today are different, but they aren't bad. One thing that is done by teenagers that is bad is drugs. I think this is because parents aren't close to their children as they used to be. I think the economy is such that both parents have to work to make a living, which has changed the family attitude. I also feel that there are many women who are working who shouldn't. These young people are living in a very difficult age; everything is so different. I think they have a harder time now than when I was their age, but then I was an orphan at 14, so I



High School 1914

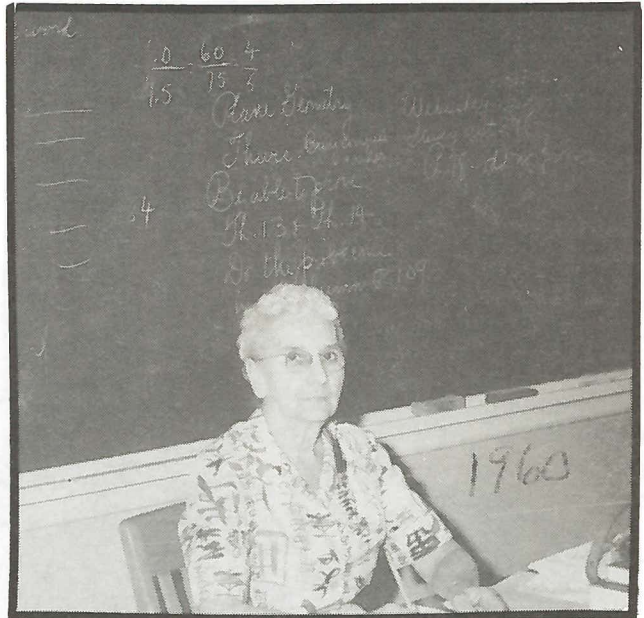
don't know."

Mrs. Campbell has an endless list of everyday hobbies and interests. She told me she enjoyed, "...latchhook, string art, crossword puzzles, reading, and bridge. I belong to several organizations: American Association of University Women, Delta Kappa Gamma, L.R.C. (Ladies Recreation Club) and P.E.O. which is an organization of women who are interested in the advancement of education."

I asked Mrs. Campbell about the secret of living a long life. She told me, "I have always been a healthy person. I had not been in the hospital since my daughter was born. Later the doctor's couldn't believe I didn't have a medical record. I really think people are living too long these days, because it is too hard to be taken care of."

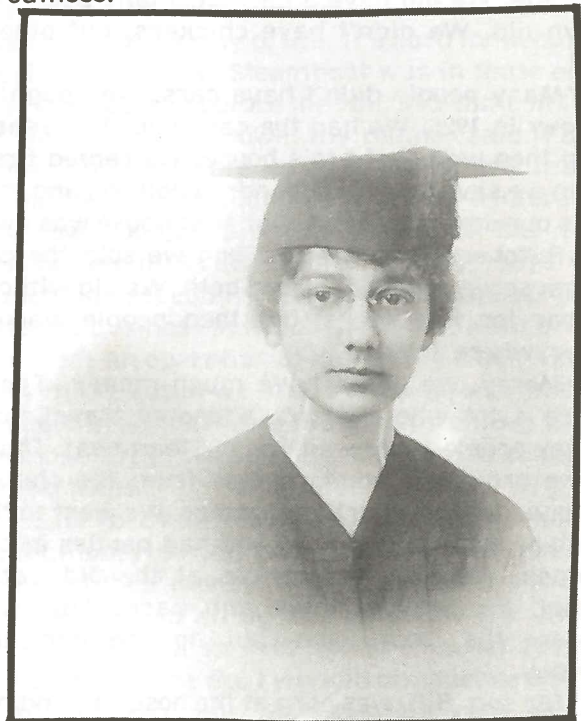
Then Mrs. Campbell went on to explain her feelings about society. "I just don't like to be put before the public. I was a strict teacher, and I didn't have any problems with the children, because they respected me. I think that is one of things that a teacher must make clear: respect. The students appreciated my efforts when they went on to college and did well. Many of them did so well in math that they realized I helped get them started right."

When Mrs. Campbell retired she was presented a personal award, a scholastic award and a service award. In addition Mrs. Campbell



was given a paid vacation to Italy. She was also presented with a citation in recognition of a significant contribution to the teaching profession as advisor for the Steamboat Springs Chapter National Honor Society. She was awarded a certificate of appreciation from the Lion's Club, and last but not least Mrs. Campbell was elected teacher of the year in 1959.

As the author of this story I feel that Mrs. Gertrude Campbell is one of the most intelligent vocal and inspiring women I have ever met. Mrs. Campbell told me as I was leaving the interview to keep the story "short and sweet", and I did my best, hoping that I had truly characterized her greatness.



♫ School days, school days... ♪