

Chapter Five - Glade Creek

Since in our county we had school for only three or four months, I decided the next year I would take the whole year in teaching if I could get a school in another county. I applied to the Superintendent in Putnam County to give me the Glade Creek School on the mountain near Ravenscroft. It was two miles back in the woods. There had been ninety pupils in that school the year before. But they had run off the assistant teacher in two months, and the Principal the third month. AT this time only thirty pupils were left. When I went to the Superintendent to ask for this school, he said, "You are too young and you're too little. We need a strong man for this school."

I said, "Mr. Gentry, you don't know my strength."

"I don't think you should go."

"Well, please let me try it."

He said, "Okay. I don't think you can hold out, but I'll let you try."

I had heard that Glade Creek was quite a rough school and community. I went out there two weeks before school began. There was one lovely family that had always cooperated. In fact, it was the first family I met. The mother told me all about what had happened the year before.

I said, "Will you let one of your children ride with me to some of the homes? I want to get as many children back in school as I can"

She said, "Yes, but you'd better go to the schoolhouse first. There has been so much damage done."

I said, "Okay." And I got her husband to go with me to the school. I found twenty-four window panes out. Two window sashes needed fixing. The stage needed underpinning. The well windlass had been torn down. The school equipment had been destroyed.

So I said, "Mr. Angel, will you please see that this is fixed if I get the materials and have them brought up here from a store?"

He said, "Yes", and before school started he had all the things fixed.

In the meantime I had been going into different homes, telling the children to please start to school. It seemed that they all had a negative outlook, because the teachers were run off the year before. But I assured them we would all work together.

Half the homes in Glade Creek were Czechoslovakian. The families had come there from Wheeling, West Virginia, to find work in the coal mines. The parents had not yet learned English, so the children had to interpret what I said. They didn't think that the American teachers had treated them right the year before. They didn't think the teacher cared for them. Yet they wanted so badly to get an education. Each time I went to one of these homes I assured them that I was on their side.

I found a boarding place about a mile from school at the Bailey's home where I had a seventh grade pupil. She was a fine girl. On the way to school she would tell me about different incidents.

After I got started at school I learned that it wasn't the pupils who had torn up the school the year before. It was a man who had been in the Army. A friend he had made, who lived in the North, had come to the mountains to visit him. He had a thousand dollars with him. The man decided that he would get those thousand dollars. So one morning he enticed his friend -- supposedly his friend -- out into the woods and shot him. He put his hat on his head and the gun beside him. In about a week's time, people in the community had noticed that the buzzards were lying around pretty thick in this area. They went over and saw this fellow they heard had come to visit. They called the police, but there was no proof that the man had killed his Army friend. They had watched his home, and seen new things brought in that they knew this man couldn't afford. So we decided that he was the one who had torn up the schoolhouse.

After hearing these reports, I announced that no one had better damage the school in any way. If they did, I had enough pull with the Sheriff to have him arrested.

So things went along beautifully, and people began to come to school. But the children still doubted my ability to make them mind. They would get up without permission, go out in the woods, take a smoke, or decide to come back. Well, I had told them in the beginning there was only one rule. Every child who came to that school knew right from wrong. "Do the right," I said. "You know the right." And I wrote on the blackboard DO THE RIGHT.

But they were still bothered, and I whipped twelve to eighteen a day the first month. I was worn out from whipping when I went home every evening and lay down for a rest before my evening meal.

I thought I would never calm these children down. But by the time the month was over, they had all decided that when I said a thing one time, it must be done.

By the end of the month I had fifty children in eight grades. I went to the Superintendent and said, "You promised me if I got as many as fifty children in school you'd give me an assistant."

He said, "Oh, you'll never keep that many."

I said, "Mr. Gentry, you know you told me that you would give me an assistant. I have fifty children that are hard to control."

"You'll never keep'em. Now, I tell you what I'll do. If you get as many as sixty-five, I will give you an assistant."

Well, I went back very disappointed, but I went after the sixty-five.

I got sixty-four pupils in the next two weeks to enter school. I visited in the homes and found out there were a good many that were supposed to be in school but hadn't come yet.

I went back to the Superintendent and he said, "I told you sixty-five."

Well, by this time I was kind of upset by the Superintendent, and I said to myself, "There are two dogs that come to school every day and fight. I think I'll enroll them" That was only what I was thinking, but I never said it.

I had one girl, Lurline Angel, taking the 8th grade work over, so she's be a better high school student. She had decided that she wanted to be a teacher some day. I said, "Lurline, I'm going to teach you now how to teach. I'm going to let you have my little 1st and 2nd graders now and then." I had seventeen pupils in the 1st grade and I taught Lurline how to take these children to one side of the room while I was teaching another class.

Well, I taught the eight months. I went into every home and ate meals. I had thirty-three Czechoslovakian children, and I want to tell you about one little incident.

I was the type of teacher who wanted to examine the children for itch or lice. I found one family with itch. I told these children to go home, and I gave them a remedy to cure it in three days. Then they could come back to school. But the children's mother sent them right back and said, "No teacher is supposed to tell her pupils how to get rid of diseases."

After school I took these children home. Their mother could not speak a word of English. I had to get the pupil to interpret for me.

The mother had a baby about a year old on her lap, and the baby was crying. I said, "Mrs. Pashek, will you raise that baby's clothes and let me see why it's crying?"

She lifted up the little slip. It was woolen, right next to the child's stomach. There was a big sore right around the navel. I said, "Oh, dear. It has itch." I said, "Now, do you want to get rid of that?"

She had decided by that time that I was a friend. She said, "We got this itch from an American, a low-down American."

And I said, "A low-down American would carry the itch, but a good American would not have it, because he would get rid of it. And that's what I want you to do. Be good and get rid of the itch. Then your children can learn."

So she took the remedy I gave her and kept the children out of school until they were rid of the itch and came back happy. Later on I was invited to their home for an evening meal.

By this time the children had begun to respect me a great deal, and I went to many of their homes.

Sometimes I went home to Yankeetown for the weekend. I went back and forth with a friend I had met. He had a little car. Not many people had cars in those days, but he was quite well-to-do for a farmer. His name was Casto MacComic. He was a very timid young man who had not gone with many girls. But he liked me and he'd come to my home on Sunday afternoon to take me out to school, which was fifteen miles or more. We had to go to the top of the mountain in White County and then go two miles into Putnam County, then another mile to where I boarded. Well, he'd take me and stay with me on Sunday afternoon until around four o'clock or better, and then go home. Then he began to stay a little later.

The children had been talking about me in their homes and a young Czechoslovakian man, a very handsome young feller, decided he wanted to meet me.

I said to the girl where I boarded, "Viola, you have a sister who married a Czechoslovakian. I have heard that they dance very beautifully. I'd like to learn the Czechoslovakian dance."

She said, "Okay. I'll get my sister to invite this young man to her house, and you and I will go over and he'll teach you the Czechoslovakian dance."

When we went in that night, the first thing Mrs. Pashek offered us was wine.

I said, "Mrs. Pashek, I do not drink wine."

She said, "Oh, my little girl, just a first grader, can drink a glass of wine."

"Your little girl was brought up on wine, and I wasn't."

But to show that I wanted to be one of their friends I did drink about a fourth of a glass.

Well, there was this young man, all dressed up. They put on a phonograph record with Czechoslovakian music and he said, "Okay, come on, let's dance." I got up and he turned me around about twenty-five times. By then I was what you call dizzy drunk.

I said, "I've got to go out on the back porch a minute."

When we came back he taught me a few steps.

During the evening I told Viola, "I was bout half drunk. Now don't you tell anybody, not anybody. Because this is terrible for me."

But we had a very nice evening, other than dancing.

After that the Czechoslovakian man decided that he did not want my friend, Casto MacComic to come out to Glade Creek with me. One evening he met him on his way back home and said, "The women in this community are the ones that we go with. You just stay away.!"

This kind of frightened my friend. He would bring me back at times, but he made sure to leave before dark on Sunday night.

One pupil in the first grade was named Zdinka Zizku. Prior to this, in schools that I had taught, I had learned the children's names by the third day at the most. But it took me almost two weeks to remember and spell this girl's name. One day I decided I would ask if I could go home with her and spend the evening. I told her to ask her mother if she would like me to come for the evening meal and talk with the family.

Yes, they would be happy to have me. Well, everything was reeking with garlic. The little girl's breath had been smelling of garlic until I could hardly stand it, because I wasn't used to the garlic smell. I thought to myself, "Well, if they can eat this stuff all the time with their food, I can eat it once."

I was in the habit of putting my arm around the first graders bringing them close to me to show them, from the one book, how to read. But Zdinka was reeking with garlic every day. I got a special book for her and told her to stand at a distance of three or four feet. "You are special," I said, "so I'm going to let you have your own book." This is the way I taught her how to read.

I wanted to get the older boys and girls to feel that I was a real friend. I thought it would help if I played with them. There was so little room to play that I told the boys to cut limbs and we would pole vault across the road. It was a clay road, just a single lane. So we pole vaulted to see who could jump the farthest. We had a lot of fun, and I found an improvement in discipline.

When I first went to this school they showed me a marker and said, "This is the place where an unknown teacher is buried."

I said, "Well, that's a good marker for a home base. We'll use that headstone to play baseball." I did this in order to let them know I wasn't afraid. And we did use the headstone that year playing baseball.

Christmas time came along. This was an eight-months school and now the term was half up. I said, "By the way, have you ever had a Christmas tree here?"

They said, "No."

I said, "Would you like to have one?"

"Oh, yes, We would"

I said, "Well, we'll have a big Christmas tree."

So we began to plan. Now in those days we had no curtains in the windows, so to darken the room for our program we filled the windows with holly or green cedar. It made them look Christmasy. We decorated the room with crepe paper and the girls and I made popcorn strings to tie on the tree.

My Czechoslovakian friend, who had tried to teach me to dance, volunteered to get his car -- by this time he had a car -- and take Viola and me down to Sparta. We planned to get every man who was coming to the Christmas tree a handkerchief and a pair of socks for a present. We decided to give the ladies fruit and a handkerchief. I bought apples for them. There were one hundred and eight people we knew were coming to the Christmas tree. So we decided it would take us all day to get the presents. When we got to Sparta, a little town I knew well, we went into the ten cents store. All at once I began feeling faint. I said to the store keeper, "I think I'm going to faint."

He said, "Well, there's a furniture store next door. You go in there and lie down on the sofa."

They took me in there, and I said, "Please go and get the things."

But they said, "No, we can't buy things without you."

Well, I fainted. And then I came to. And I said, "Well, I feel

pretty good now. We'll go and get all the things."

That afternoon we went back carrying all the presents for the men and boys, and the ladies' handkerchiefs.

We had quite a nice Christmas tree. And that was another thing that made the people think more and more of me. By this time we were all quite good friends and I enjoyed teaching the rest of the year. There were seven 8th graders who passed the examination to go to high school -- seven out of eight pupils. The girl who had helped to teach the first and some of the second grade children was very happy and pleased with her work. Later on she became an excellent teacher.

After the term was over Mr. Pashek and his family decided they wanted me to come back to Glade Creek to teach the next year. He got on his mule and rode twenty miles over the mountain to ask the Superintendent, "Please send Miss Verla back to teach for us."

But I decided the school really had too many pupils and too many grades for one teacher.