

When someone passes away who at some point in life crossed paths with you, it takes you back to a place in time and brings back a lot of memories. Such was the case recently when I had read that 1942 WCHS graduate Mernyce Nelson Steberg had died at the age of 95. This news suddenly took me back to 1961 when I entered 3rd grade and Mrs. Steberg was my teacher. She was a wonderful teacher and that was one of my favorite years in school. My good friend and farm broadcast partner Jon Phillips in Omaha always said he liked 3rd grade so much that he stayed an extra year. Or as he described it, he was red-shirted in 3rd grade.

Mrs. Steberg had that very gentle way of teaching but yet she kept discipline just by looking at you. Here's a case in point. My 3rd grade room for the 1961/62 school year was on the southwest corner of the first floor.



This picture is from the 1962 WCHS yearbook. Mrs. Steberg is seen here with students who would later become the graduating class of 1971. From front to back in left row: Linda Gochenaur, Judy Quimby, Merlin Moreland, Steve Johnson, Joann Meyer. Next row from front to back: Emery Kleven, Helen Gillard, Karen Hubner, Steve Frederick. Row on far right: Karl Flormoe and Cindy Henry being helped by Mernyce Steberg

A girl classmate of mine, not in picture above and who I will not name here to save her from embarrassment, went with me down the stairs to the room in the southeast corner of the basement level. We went there to kiss for the first time. After that highlight of my life to that point, we walked out and were met immediately by Mrs. Steberg. She never said a word but the look she gave us spoke louder than any words would have. It scared me so much that I never kissed a girl for the next 20 years. She could have yelled at us or called our parents or sent us to the principal but she didn't do any of that. That look was her gentle way of saying I don't want to see you two do that ever again. And she didn't have to look twice at me. Like I said, it was 20 years and from then on, I only went in that room for Cub Scout meetings. To this day when I'm at the museum, I hesitate to go in that room for fear of being looked at sternly when I come out.

During the winter of that school year, Mernyce and her husband took a trip to Hawaii. I almost feel guilty calling her Mernyce in this column as she was always Mrs. Steberg to me and my classmates. When she returned home, she had brought a fresh pineapple back to share with the class. The pineapple was her 'show and tell' if you will. She used it as a teachable moment for us. Then she proceeded to cut it into small pieces and put those on a toothpick. We each got one. I remember Karl Flormoe and I treated it like a tootsie pop. We tried to see who could keep it the longest. Finally after about 10 minutes we finally ate it. We thought sure we kept ours the longest. But after about another 10 minutes, Mrs. Steberg raised her voice, which was the only time I remember that happening. She firmly told classmate Bob Kolb to finish the pineapple. Karl and I looked at each other realizing that we lost the contest as to who kept it the longest. Karl and I were very proud of Bob that day.

She did kind of raise her voice to me once. We had our chairs lined up in a big semi-circle as she was reading a story. When a student had a comment or question, we were to stand up so we could all hear. Sitting next to me as he evidently did a lot was Karl. As he was standing saying something I slowly moved his chair back so when he sat down he went right to the floor. After the class had lowered the sound of laughter somewhat, Mrs. Steberg asked me sternly if I had done that. I sheepishly shook my head no and that was the end of that even though I knew that she knew I did. After a while, I leaned over to Karl and whispered an apology as I told him I did move the chair.

I was in Arizona this past February and had the opportunity to visit with Karl near his home in Fountain Hills which is just northeast of Phoenix. I had not seen him since shortly after high school graduation so that would be a good 40 years plus since we last saw each other. I asked him if he remembered that chair pulling incident and he did not. So I'm clear of that petty misdemeanor. The kissing incident however, is still under investigation.

One other memory I have of that 3rd grade has nothing to do with Mrs. Steberg or Karl or kissing. It has to do with baseball cards. The Minnesota Twins had just concluded their first season and I had become a big baseball fan already. I had a shoebox full of baseball cards that I brought to school in the spring of '62' to that very room for 'show and tell'. As school let out for the year, I had forgotten the box in the room and I think they got thrown out during the summer. I always think that as those cards became more valuable, I probably lost out on over \$5000 worth of cards. There was possibly a Lou Brock rookie card in there or a Boog Powell or Rich Rollins rookie card along with Mickey Mantle, Roger Maris and Willie Mays cards. Now that's what should be investigated and not the kissing incident.

Here's a picture of my visit with Karl Flormoe in Arizona in February, 2020, 49 years after we graduated West Concord High School. We haven't changed a bit. OK, we have added about 10 pounds each.

