



## Chapter II

### MY FIRST SCHOOL

I must tell you about my first year in school. By this time the folks had three of us old enough to go to school. There was Willie, nine, Nellie, seven, and I was five. There was also Earl who was not old enough to go to school. Willie and Nellie had gone some to summer school at that time. There weren't many schools in the country in those days so the folks moved to Redding for the winter so we could go to school. I don't remember much that I learned that first year in school. In fact, about the only things I can remember about the first year are the things I was afraid of so I must have been a coward. One of those things was a dog that chased us on the way to school. If Mother couldn't go with us part of the way to school, we soon learned to walk two or three blocks further so we would miss the house with the dog.

The house we rented and lived in was some place just above the Court House, either on what is West or Willis Street. That was about the west edge of town at that time. The Court House was built in 1889, the year I was born, so it would have been only five years old at that time. I remember we walked by the Court House to go to school. I know we walked quite a ways to school, so the school we went to must have been the one on Pine Street. It has now been torn down and the lot made into a parking lot. There was only one house close to ours and I remember they had an elderly man living with them. I think he was the wife's father. They used to lock him up in a little building in the back to keep him from going down town. The lady said he would get drunk if he went down town. He used to beg us kids to let him out. I felt so sorry for him that I tried to let him out but I never could get the door open.

To get back to school. The other thing I was afraid of was the Principal of the school. I had seen him a few times, and I am sure there is no man that exists today as big as he looked to me. I guess it was from something I had heard people say. I don't know where else I could have gotten the idea. Anyway I thought all men teachers, especially principals, were mean to small boys. Through all my school days, I was always glad that I never had a man teacher.

When I tell you of this incident, I am sure that you will agree that I had a reason to be afraid of the Principal. There was a pretty little girl named Sally who sat right in front of me. She had long blonde hair and it was in two braids that hung down her back. Each braid was tied with a red ribbon near the end of the braids. Now I didn't put the whole braid in the ink well - just the end of one braid - the part below the ribbon. I didn't think

that was anything to make a fuss about, but Sally screamed. At the same time she pulled her braids over her shoulders and got ink on her dress. By that time the teacher was there. She grabbed me by the arm and said, "Young man you are going to the Principal." That is the first time I ever remember being called a "young man". I guess I decided if I was a young man I wasn't big enough to argue the question, so I went along. When we reached the Principal's office, she opened the door and there sat the Principal at his desk. He looked bigger than ever to me and I began to get scared. The teacher advised him of the crime I had committed. He looked at me and said, "Young man, did you do a thing like that?" That was the second time I had been called a young man in one day. I was pretty scared but I managed to get out a "Yes, sir." I had been taught at home to tell the truth and although I didn't always stick to it, that day I did. I had also been taught to say "Yes, sir" and "No, sir" and "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am". The next question he asked me was, "Why did you do it?" About that time the big tears began to roll down my cheeks and for some reason I couldn't answer him. To this day I don't know whether it was the tears that drowned my voice so that it wouldn't work or whether I didn't know the answer to his second question so couldn't answer it. Anyway, I just stood there speechless. I know I didn't think that I was a bad boy, and I knew I didn't want to be a bad boy, so why did I put Sally's hair in the ink well? The Apostle Paul said, "Good that I would do, I do not, but the evil which I would not do, that I do." Now I didn't know about Paul's troubles or his teaching at that time. If I had, I might have been able to give the principal an answer to his second question. I didn't get the whipping that I expected to get and no doubt deserved, but I think I came the nearest to getting one that I ever did in my school days.

Another time during the school term, I was taken to the principal's office. This time I was accused of writing on the wall in the boys rest room. I wasn't so scared this time because I knew that I had not done what I was being accused of. Another boy older than I had done the writing and told the teacher that I did it. The principal asked me if I had written on the wall and when I said "No", I guess he wanted to be sure so he put a piece of paper before me and asked me to write the words that were written on the wall. I can't tell you what the words were because they wouldn't look good in print. I told the principal that the teacher had not taught us to write those words yet. This must have convinced him that I was innocent. The teacher told me the next day that the other boy got a whipping - not so much for writing on the wall as for what he wrote and trying to blame it on someone else.

After my first encounter with the principal, I must have been scared into giving up my life of crime and going to work. I still have the report card that I got at the end of the term showing that my average for the last month of school was 99%. I don't know how this card happened to be

preserved all these years. Maybe it was the only good one I ever got or maybe the Lord wanted me to have that report card in later years to encourage me.

The teacher in this, my first year of school, was Miss Margaret I. Poor. She later became Superintendent of Schools in Shasta County and served from 1898 to 1902. The name of the principal has escaped my memory.

I said that I didn't remember much that I learned that first year in school. However, Miss Poor was considered one of the best teachers of her time, so I am sure that I did learn some things. I learned that letters, if used right, would make words, and that learning to use the letters right was learning to spell. Also that words, if used right, made a language, and using them right was called grammar. Also that if language was put on paper, it was writing. I remember the teacher telling us that it didn't do any good to write if we didn't write good enough so people could read it.

Compared to some of the kids going to school now, maybe I didn't do too bad my first year. A high school teacher told me recently about a boy he had in his class. On his paper he spelled farm "f-o-r-m." The teacher thought he maybe hadn't read his writing right so he asked him how to spell farm. The boy said "f-o-r-m".



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