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Sunday School

The first memories I have about Sunday School concern when I started around kindergarten age. I loved the school-like atmosphere in the Primary Department, where we typically joined all the primary-aged children and their teachers for an assembly, during which we sang songs accompanied by a teacher playing the upright piano; often the high notes on the slightly out-of-tune piano had a strange ring that was a fitting counterpart for the lead teacher's quavery voice. I thought it would be wonderful to make sounds like that, for we loved her, even if her voice did sound a little bit funny. In the small classroom for the following lesson for our age group, I found the furniture especially fascinating: the almost-round, low table, painted a creamy white enamel, with a circular cut out and a medium-sized chair for the teacher, while the little pupils sat around the table on low chairs. She would tell us the story for the day and then would hand each of us a folder with the story illustrated by line drawings for us to color. We took the leaflets home to show our parents what the story was about and to hear the usual praise about our coloring skills.

Our graduation to the Junior Department took us to slightly larger chairs and tables but essentially the same routine, and in the Senior Department, the individual classrooms lacked the round tables. We simply sat around our teacher and listened to her as essentially well-behaved children, none yet at the rebellious stage which most of us experienced later.

One teacher I had when I was nine or ten years old stands out in my mind. She was Marguerite Teagarden, a member of a family that was well known and respected in the church. There were several daughters (I'll say five because that's all the names I remember, but there may have been more). All were named for flowers: Pansy, Rose, Daisy, Gardenia, and our teacher, Marguerite. We were told that *Marguerite* was indeed a flower, a variety of daisy. (It's out of order here, but they had one brother named Robin. Several years later, Robin was my teacher, but I can't tell you much about him except that his really sad ineptitude as the leader of adolescents bolstered my determination to attend Sunday School as seldom as possible. You can imagine what budding adolescents had to say about him and his name.)

But back to Marguerite - rather, *Miss* Teagarden, as we called her. She was very plain, with small eyes surrounded by very short, stiff lashes. As I said, we were fairly well behaved and didn't ever intend to hurt anyone's feelings, especially our teacher's, but in her case, in spite of her earnestness, or perhaps because of it, she was not a very good leader and it was difficult to be attentive. Unfortunately, for example, one of us discovered that she was a really interesting study when she prayed, which she did at least twice every session. Soon, all of us were peeping up with still-bowed heads to watch her pray. Her eyelids fluttered rapidly and constantly during her prayers, somehow emphasizing her very short eyelashes. I doubt that any of us ever really heard a word she said because we were too intent on trying to emulate her lid-fluttering without dissolving into giggles. We never did actually giggle, but I wonder now if she must not have been

aware of our small movements and inattention. At least we waited until we had been dismissed and she had disappeared to discuss what we had seen and try to match her movements. I never discussed her at home, for I did feel a twinge of guilt for what I perceived as mockery.

Maybe her efforts were not entirely in vain; I remember her and her earnestness as well as my own childish inattention, while all the other teachers I had remain anonymous today.

As an adult I've served my time in the Sunday School classroom, but I've never taught a class of children where I didn't recall Miss Teagarden and wonder what the children in my class were finding funny about me. My students haven't been as polite as we were, but their uninhibited participation or lack of it may be healthier than ours was. Of course, the physical nature of the classrooms was different: no more little round tables with cut-outs for the teacher. All of our chairs were scaled down to the size of the children, and many of our activities took place on the floor. A few youngsters do stand out in my memory. I especially recall five-year-old Lucy, a redheaded free spirit who had an entirely original slant on life. One Sunday she came conventionally decked out in her Sunday finery but smelling like ashes. We later learned she had been rescued from the fireplace after she was dressed; her mother hastily brushed the ashes from her clothes, hair, and hands but couldn't do a thing about the residual odor, which was impressive. On another occasion, she amiably refused to participate in any activity but agreed to listen to the story, as long as she was allowed to sit in the wastepaper basket. Years later, George, our older son, and Lucy met in a business enterprise when her father commissioned George to produce a multimedia show for his real estate business. He said she was still an original but with much better control of her actions.

During another Sunday School-teaching period after the boys were grown, I met my match in a little genius I'll call Quentin. At six he was so far ahead of his classmates that he was easily bored by any activity they were able to handle. He could create chaos by poking one neighbor in the ribs, at the same time damaging the pictures his other neighbors might be industriously drawing. He never missed a Sunday. Finally, I recruited a helper whose sole duty was keeping Quentin occupied with sufficiently challenging activities. I have many stories about Quentin, needless to say.

However, I can't help wondering if, in years to come, Quentin will look back on his relationship with me and regret some of his behavior. Somehow, I doubt it. He won't even remember my name. After all, I only bored him without giving him any intriguingly eccentric behavior to remember. As far as I knew, of course.