

## SPECIAL FOCUS

*Since the Protestant Reformed schools are all comparatively young, we have not heretofore seen in them much in the way of retirement from the teaching profession. Now that we've passed the forty-year mark, however, there'll probably be more of that sort of thing. In fact, June of this very year saw the retirement of one of the old guard. Miss Jess Dykstra (cover photo), one of our "special education" teachers, did not return to the classroom in September. Jess has seen a lot of Septembers — and many of them have been as a teacher in one capacity or another. The first such September (i.e., the first as a teacher) was back in 1945. Miss Dykstra had had three years of college by that time, and, encouraged by the pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Manhattan, Montana, she left Calvin College before obtaining her degree and her teaching certificate, in order to teach in the school which the children of our church in that town attended.*

*She taught there for two years, the first of which was in grades 4, 5, and 6. The second year found her, for the better part of the school day, at the head of grades 3, 4, and 5. As if that combination of grades was not already quite enough, she was assigned also the job of teaching geometry and algebra to 10th and 11th graders during another part of the day. Interestingly, among her high school students at that time was a young man by the name of Fred Hanko — a "preacher's kid," who would one day become also a colleague of hers in the teaching profession. Not only, incidentally, did Mr. Hanko become a teacher, he became, at a number of different schools, a teacher of algebra. Evidently he learned his lessons well, under Miss Dykstra.*

*Early in 1947, in her second year in Manhattan, Jess received a telegram from Grand Rapids. Hope School was in the process of being built, and there was an urgent need for teachers. Two of them. That's right, the school which was destined to become the largest of the Protestant Reformed elementary schools had a small beginning — a two-room building, with 52 students. Thirty of them (in grades 1-4) became Jess Dykstra's. She left Fred Hanko to take his Trig from somebody else in Manhattan, and she took on the likes of Mary Beth Engelsma, Gerald Kuiper, Harry*

*Langerak, and John Kalsbeek in the 1st grade, and one David Engelsma in the 4th, at Hope School in Grand Rapids.*

*She taught there for a year and then went back to Calvin to finish up her own schooling. In 1949 she was back at Hope, as part of an expanded faculty of three. The reason for the expansion of the faculty was the increased enrollment. The building, however, had not expanded along with it. So one of the three groups into which the student body was divided had to meet in the basement of Hope Church. That was Jess Dykstra's lot. When asked, recently, what she considered to be the highlights of her career, she mentioned only two. One of them was the excitement of being part of Hope's first staff. And the other was the thrill of moving out of the church basement into a new school classroom. (Imagine how she would have felt if she had been the kindergarten teacher who, the next year, taught kindergarten in Hope School's furnace room! Ah, yes — those were the days, weren't they?)*

*For ten years Miss Dykstra stayed at Hope School. Then she moved on to other things. Having developed an interest in special education, she accepted a position at Children's Retreat. To this day she remembers the names and the personalities of the "special" children she taught during her ten years there. Among them was Carol Pastoor, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Pastoor, of First Church.*

*During her years at Children's Retreat, Jess attended the University of Michigan. After acquiring her Master's Degree in Special Ed. from the U. of M., she went to Western Michigan to study school psychology (psychological testing and related services). With that, she took a new position, as school psychologist for Montcalm County. Ten years she worked for Montcalm County.*

*A varied career, certainly... and one which ended about where it began. That is, not in Manhattan, but in Hope School. At least, in Hope's building. In 1984 she was hired by the Board of the Society for Protestant Reformed Special Education to teach the "special" children of our churches in the Grand Rapids area. A room for that purpose was provided in Hope School. Jess was able therefore to close out her career in the school which had meant so much to her, and with the kind of children which she had learned to love, and with whom she had learned to work so effectively.*

*How effectively? Mr. Roland Petersen, a teacher at Hope School, speaks to that, in the article which follows:*

# A Tribute to Miss Jessie Dykstra

Roland Petersen

Many years ago, at a school event of some sort, I heard a parent admiring a classroom art project. The occasion and the identity of the parent are long-forgotten. The teacher's reply, however, has stayed with me through the years. "Yes, it takes a good teacher to do work like that!" Shocked, I looked for some evidence that this remark was evoked by a "private joke" of the sort that we often share with our closest friends. No, this teacher was serious in proclaiming herself a "good teacher."

For all I know, she really was a “good teacher.” Still, I have often wondered why she felt it necessary to “toot her own horn” in such an obvious manner.

For the past several years we at Hope School were privileged to witness the artistry of a *Master Teacher*. She never had to tell us this; she was, in fact, rather quiet and seldom spoke of what she was doing or how she was doing it. Nevertheless, her product spoke

eloquently of her mastery! Her very special students gave us all that we needed to make the evaluation, “master teacher.”

My only brother was born with *Down's Syndrome*, so I can understand from firsthand experience what it is like to work with the "slow learner," the "learning disabled," the "mentally handicapped," the "special child," or whatever we choose to call them. Whenever I observed Miss Dykstra working with her "special" bunch I was impressed by her wisdom and her patience (which, by the way, far exceeded mine!) in dealing with those whom God in His infinite wisdom, has made "special."

Master teacher, Jessie Dykstra,  
I wish you God's blessing, and  
thank you for your diligent,  
patient, and *loving* work done  
with our "special children" and  
for the lessons in patience that  
I have learned from your  
example!

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