

The Twenties - Those Were the Days

Written by Minerva Graham for the Homecoming 1980 Yearbook

Hello, old friends - and welcome back! With much pleasure and nostalgia I “take pen in hand” for a trip through the halls of dear old Timmins High BEFORE it became Timmins High and Vocational School - 200 students grand total - year 1927.

My first and most debasing experience upon arrival was being shoved into a roomful of squirming and screaming first-formers. I had asked the Janitor where fourth-formers were to meet. He took one look at me and snorted:”Fourth formers! FIRST-formers is what you want! In here!” (I must admit he apologized graciously later, and even put a mirror in the girls’ washroom at MY eye level, by way of amends.)

The halls! The camaraderie, laughing and jostling. I can still see Margaret (Peggy) McPhail with that majestic walk. She never seemed to hurry, yet she was always on time. Tall, lithe Ethel Allworth going down the hall - usually with myself - we were inseparable. I can still hear the whispered “Mutt and Jeff” as we passed but always in fun.

The time I caught my heel and literally flew down not ONE, but TWO flights of stairs. Were it not for sturdy Mr. Henry, our Math teacher, who caught me I might STILL be rolling down those corridors. It was a good thing that an irresistible force DID meet an immovable object.



Architectural drawing of the new TH&TS

More recollections rush in! Jenny Farley fainting on the doorstep of our room after writing a “trig” exam. No wonder! When the papers were returned, hadn’t she scored a hundred! And the “Lits” – Sonia Charron and Edna Poitras’ beautiful voices still linger in my memory. The High School Orchestra! Jimmy Ormston on piano; Len Caveney and Gino Biondi, the brass; Harold Craig on drums and Bill Shub, David Payne and myself, the strings.



Principal Treleaven (centre) & Staff in 1929

And what would school be without those special memories of teachers - some favorite - some otherwise! Of course, on maturing, we realized that some of us were favorites, some otherwise too!

Mr. Treleaven, our principal and Latin teacher, a kindly man, was “semper fidelis” to us, but I’m afraid found us not “semper paratus” for him! Miss Garbutt had a fine sense of humor PLUS a decided ability to get French across.

Mr. S. E. Henry, who for me, epitomized the couplet he put in my autograph album - "If you can't see the bright side of a thing, polish the dull one." I'm sure no but he could have seen me through Geometry. Miss Rutherford, who made History live and who was a tower of strength when I innocently took on the Editorship of the very first Porcupine Quill. Her quotation in my autograph album still haunts me - "Not failure - but low aim - is crime."

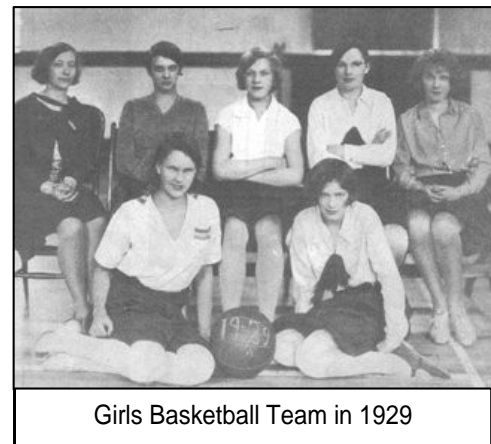
I never see, in my mind's eye, Vera Mustato without associating her lines in my autograph album:

You can't own life, you can only live it,
You can't own Love, you can only give it,
You can't own Truth, truth would die unheard,
I think that OWN is a foolish word!

How true, even today.

As I leaf through the pages, I see lines in Italian, German, Ukrainian, French, Latin Greek, and Finnish, and realize that this is what made us so unique. The warp and woof of the area were woven into the mosaic that made us one, yet kept us different.

Ah yes, P.T. not Phys. Ed., as it is called today. Here I was introduced to Basketball and black eyes, simultaneously. At that time in the game, there was a running centre - me, on our side. My counterpart, Elsie Henderson, was long and lean, with elbows to match. I ran right into both of them the first time I was on the court. How I was twitted about "running into a door". Doug Carriere, who became a life-long friend, introduced me to tennis. I can still remember coming into Science class with him and talking over a match so excitedly that Miss Lillie Quinn brought us back to the present by clapping two retort flasks together so sharply that I fell right off my stool. Doug had to yank me back up again. Undoubtedly, Miss Quinn was one of the finest and most-loved teachers TH&VS ever had.



Girls Basketball Team in 1929

Why something else intrudes upon my memory here I don't know, but it does – the inequities of our transportation system. Schumacher had no Continuation School, so their students bussed right to the door. South Porcupine did have one, so only the final year students had to go to Timmins. Since there were only eleven of us, we did not warrant the hiring of a bus by the Board of Education. We had to catch the regular bus and get off at Dalton's (where Woolco is now located) and make our way on foot, to the school. Several dogs took it upon themselves to form "friendly?" packs to waylay us, so we had to devise devious routes to elude them.

Those long cold treks bring to mind an episode that happened the following year when I took the "Commercial Special". I had just arrived, with frozen fingers, to be told to hurry, as we were going to have a speed test in typing. You can imagine the results! For several years, with my name prominently mentioned, that disastrous display served as a prime example of what NOT to do! Yet, something very

important was gained from that experience too I made it a point throughout my subsequent teaching career not to ridicule my pupils - ever!

The images that slip through my mind - racing for expression - Alma Tario winning the Senior Girls' Championship and Jack Len, the Senior Boys'; a little red head in Grade Nine, Kitty Duxfield, doing the Irish Jig for a "Lit" program; and the whole Senior Room taking off one fine afternoon to see "Seventh Heaven" with Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell. How the girls cried through the performance!

The many times I went home with Rose Bucovetsky for supper, with the father admonishing the children in the same manner and words as Miss Rutherford: "Not failure, but low aim, is a crime." What a fine rapport the parents had with their family!

I still chuckle every time I read Tomye Church's account of the 1928 Cavalcade on the official opening of the Ferguson Highway. His autograph reads: "Let me hold in a frame of silence your picture as my friend." But how could one ever equate Tomye and silence?

I remember the keen wit of Pat Murphy and Tom Cooper, and Walter Boyle's wide grin. What a delightful surprise to meet Jack Cuthbertson after a lapse of fifty-one years. He astounded me by quoting verbatim the verse he had put in my autograph album:

Read these words so true and wise,
That comes from an intelligent sage.
Minnie, never act your size,
But always act your age!

Faces upon faces - Manny Abrahms, charismatic and witty - it was she who not only was responsible for naming our yearbook "The Porcupine Quill", but also won the contest for naming the newest Ansara ice cream parlor "The Golden Hub". I see Eliza Cushing's blue eyes and Alice Habib's deep soft brown ones. I hear Petty Smith's ironic wit. She should have written a book on "snappy comebacks".

With pride, I hear Roy Sharp receiving the "Lamp of Learning" from the City of Timmins for his outstanding contribution to education. We had a grand reunion a few years back, when Basil Davis brought him over for a visit. I remember reading, with great pleasure, after many intervening years, an article by Horace Brown with whom I was not only in Grade One but also in Fourth Form.



Yes, we lived through the riveting and other noises of school expansion. We learned through the years to rationalize our ideals with life's realities, and thus come to terms with ourselves. And so, we have met destiny had on!

To TH&VS, I'm sure we are all grateful. For you, in part, are responsible for the way we learned to "cope". Hail and farewell