

Interview with Verna May Smith

Conducted by Gay Beaudet, Teacher, and Students of Nestucca Valley Middle School

Student: and describe, if you can, the exact location of the school.

Verna: Neskowin School, and it was about, uh... a quarter of a mile from the grocery store.

Student: All right. If you have any idea when the school started and or closed, please... tell us.

Verna: Somewheres in the early 1900's is when it started, and I think it closed in like 1948-49.

Student: After the school closed, what school did the students attend... attended... who went to the school...

Verna: They went to Oretown Grade School, which was another five miles north of Neskowin.

Student: Please describe the school in as much detail as you can, telling us about the outside and the inside of the building.

Verna: It was just a big square white building.... (laughing)... and had a wood furnace in the basement... uh... double glass doors that went in the front door, and then there was the back door was just a single width door with a glass in the top, that went the back to the merry-go-round and the playground... it was probably like on probably a half acre of ground.

Student: Did you have any bathrooms? Restrooms?

Verna: Yeah... yeah... indoor...

Student: Oh.. was there running water?

Verna: Yes.

Student: How many... how many classrooms were there?

Verna: One to begin with, and before I graduated, there were two.. they made one of the rooms that was basically the library in the first place into a classroom.

Student: Did you have any stages... for plays, or...

Verna: We had plays. We had a wooden built-up stage that was portable that they brought in and took out when we were going to use it.

Student: Was there a bell on this school?

Verna: Uh, huh (yes)... yeah, it was in a belfry.

Student: Do you know where this bell is today?

Verna: I have no idea (laughing)... maybe still in the belfry, for all I know!

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Student: *Please tell us from where to where the students lived who went to the school.*

Verna: Oh... probably the furthest ones lived like about eight miles... five miles... five to eight miles out... outside of Neskowin to the south was where the furthest ones came from.

Other voice: *Did they have to walk all that?*

Verna: No... we had a school bus. (laughing) And I have pictures of the school bus.

Student: *Uh... what were all the ways that students can go to school and come back home? Like...*

Mrs. Beaudet: *They had used a school bus....*

Verna: Yeah... right, and then...

Student: *Would they walk?*

Verna: Some of us rode the school bus, and others walked, because we were close enough that everyone that lived right in Neskowin walked, but the others rode the bus.

Student: *Please tell us the time school started each day and when it was dismissed.*

Verna: Nine o'clock and three... nine to three.

Student: *What were the days during the year that the students didn't attend school, such as Christmas.*

Verna: Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years. And we had like one or two weeks at Christmas time... it just depended on how the year fell... like it still does today... I mean, 'cause I think you guys still get, you know, like, you know, two weeks or so off at Christmas time.

Student: *Please tell us about a typical school day from the moment you left home to go to school and when you arrived back at home in the afternoon.*

Verna: Heavens! (laughing) That's been a long time ago. Probably... we left home probably around 8:30 to get to school, and we probably had like a five minute walk or so, but, uh... you know, you met all your friends and you played around during (laughing) the walk to and from school.

Student: *What were the subjects taught in school?*

Verna: Reading, writing and arithmetic.

Student: *Tell us about any extra curricular... sports clubs, etc...*

Verna: Curricular activity? 4-H clubs we had, and they were all held basically within the school... I mean, people came and taught us at school.

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Other voice: *How were the students taught? Was everyone taught together in one group, or were they smaller groups of, uh... instruction... did you teach mostly literature, or did the students study books? Did you understand that?*

Verna: We did it all ways... I mean, because at a certain point in school, I taught younger ones reading, and that's the way it worked.. I had several older kids that taught us like English and all of that stuff, because we were basically eight grades within one classroom... I mean, sometimes there was one in each class, sometimes there might be two or three in one class and one in another, but I don't remember exactly how many students there were at any given one time... I would say, probably, twenty or thirty at the most, and that ranged from first grade to eighth grade.

Student: *Was there much homework?*

Verna: Yeah, at home home. (laughing)

Student: *If someone misbehaved at school, what were some of the punishments?*

Verna: (chuckling) You had a good strict talking to, and sometimes you got a book on your fanny. And that's from experience!

Student: *Do you remember anything incidents that happened that were... do you remember anything happening in regard to the students being disciplined?*

Verna: Yeah... as for myself, I think I will never forget how to diagram... the teacher had her daughter try to teach me how to diagram, and I didn't do a very good job, and so she used the English book on my fanny. (laughing)

Mrs. Beaudet: *That wasn't nice!*

Student: *How were parents involved in discipline for the school's behavior?*

Verna: Well, if you didn't, everybody in town knew what you 'd done.

Student: *Please tell... tell about technology in school... in other words, was there a telephone, and what did the students typically write with?*

Verna: Pencils. (laughing)

Student: *That's what I thought, too.*

Mrs. Beaudet: Yeah, you're pre-computer age.

Verna: Yeah...

Mrs. Beaudet: But you had typewriters... did you learn how to use typewriters...

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Verna: Not until high school. Grade school was....

Mrs. Beaudet: *Only pencil.*

Verna: Um, hm (yes)...

Student: *What would happen if a student was hurt at school, or if there was some other emergency?*

Verna: Huh... somebody went for the grocery store man, 'cause he was usually the medic.

Student: *Please tell us about any emergencies you remember.*

Verna: Hmmm... none that I remember ever happening.

Student: *Was the community involved in the school, and was there a parent support club? Tell about programs held in the public, and tell how the building was used for community functions.*

Verna: It was used for everything. There was a... I forgot to say that there was a day off when they voted, because there was always a day off when the elections were, because they used the school house for the election board to do their thing, too, so...

Mrs. Beaudet: *Why don't you go back to the first part of that question, because there's a couple different questions there, and you're kinda' skimmin' over them.*

Student: *What was the community involved in school, and was there a parent support club?*

Verna: Well, they gatherings that the parents went to with the teachers.. I mean, we didn't do like you do now, like, uh... the teacher meets on an individual basis now with the parents and stuff, and then they have a parents club... it wasn't like that, it was just that a group of parents met and organized what they were gonna' do, and things like... we didn't have a hot lunch program, other than the fact that maybe one particular Friday or Wednesday or whatever, one mother brought chili and one brought soup another day, and all of that... that was our hot lunch program, because we just took bag lunches... that was brown bag.

Student: *Please tell us the names of any teachers and administrators.*

Verna: Hmmm.... let's see... we had... uh, Mrs. Mohler when we were in the lower grade, and Mrs. Commons, and then in the upper grades I had Ruth Crockett and Doris Bills.

Student: *Uh, what were the games that you played at recess?*

Verna: See which boy can find the most snakes to scare the girls with. (laughing) And baseball... and, uh... we had a merry-go-round in the back of the school.

Student: *Uh, please tell us any stories you remember about things that happened at school or concerning school.*

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Verna: Hmm..... well, just that we usually had, like, a Christmas program that we put on each year.

Student: *I'd like to change the subject a little to learn more about you, if I could. If it's okay to ask this, when and where were you born?*

Verna: In Corvallis, Oregon in 1934.

Student: *What is your ancestry?*

Verna: Uh.... (laughing)... that's a very good question, because I'm just going into the genealogy thing with the family, and I find that we have relatives in Minnesota that we didn't know we had... we didn't really know a whole lot when we were growing up about the background of our family, but learning now.

Student: *Hm... Please tell us about where you lived. Did your family live in one place, or did you move when you were growing up?*

Verna: Well, in my earlier years, we moved from Kings Valley to Alsea, Philomath, then to Waldport, and then to Neskowin in 1942, and from then on, we never moved.

Student: *Why did your family or your ancestors move to this area?*

Verna: My dad was in the logging industry, and that's where the loggers were that he worked with, was at Neskowin... that's why we moved to Neskowin.

Student: *Describe any significant events that occurred during your childhood.*

Verna: Ooh... (laughing)... all kinds of things... I don't know what would be most important...

Mrs. Beaudet: *To you....*

Verna: To me? Well, I remember when one of the fellows that my father worked for was from Texas, and he went to Texas and brought back a Brahma bull. And as a child, when they took this Brahma bull out of the trailer, it looked like a mountain, instead of just a bull... I mean, it was huge! I mean... we'd seen brown Swiss and all kinds of dairy cows because the dairy cows and things were around, but this Brahma would make two of any dairy cow... so, it was one of the rather interesting things.

Student: *Tell about your chores or your responsibilities as you were growing up.*

Verna: Ooh... just general wash dishes, clean house and that kind of thing, and bring wood off of the beach... every morning before we went to school and before Daddy went to work, we walked on the beach, and we all took a gunny sack along with us, and when we were coming back from our walk, we filled the bag with bark and any other kind of driftwood that was on the beach... that's how we kept warm... by wood fire... so...

Student: *When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?*

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Verna: (chuckling) Like any child, anything but what I did.

Student: *Uh, what were your favorite games, sports, books, hobbies?*

Verna: Baseball or softball, whichever... whichever they call it... at the time we had a huge... a huge ball... it wasn't like the little hard balls that they play with now, it was softball, I think... but that's the only kind of balls that we had... we didn't have any...

Student: *What do you remember most about your mother and father?*

Verna: They were hard workers.

Student: *What was the best advice your mother and/or your father gave you, or what were the good lessons that you learned from them?*

Verna: Well, basically, what I know between them and the school... I learned, I mean... keep one foot ahead of the other and go on... whichever... don't stop a task... just.... if it fails at one point, start again and do it over... I mean...

Student: *Tell us about any of your occupations and accomplishments throughout your life.*

Verna: Raised four kids. (chuckling)

Mrs. Beaudet: *Hard work.*

Student: *Please tell us about your own family.*

Verna: My own family? I married just after school, and six years later had a daughter, and then a son, and another daughter, and another son. And they are all grown and away from home.

Student: *What special skills and interests do you have?*

Verna: (chuckling) That's a good question.

Mrs. Beaudet: *What do you do for fun?*

Verna: For fun? Oh, camping, and... I like to travel.. .if the money and the travel worked hand in hand, we'd be in good shape. (laughing)

Student: *Are there any community or religious activities you would like to tell us about?*

Verna: When I was a child? Yeah, I went to Sunday School every Sunday... they... at one point... that's another thing that they had at the school... they had a Sunday School and church on Sunday.. and I went there when they had it there, but when there wasn't one there, uh... one of the neighbors was a preacher and his daughter and I were very close, so... or daughters... and so I went with them, basically, every Sunday to Sunday School and church.

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Student: *We're almost finished. Please share some thoughts you have thought about what it was like living here in this area.*

Verna: Ohhh... it was great! (laughing) Just... I don't know... we entertained ourselves with the beach and all of that sort of stuff that was around us... I mean, we didn't go to movies, we didn't have tv... we had radio, and during the war we had the coast guardsmen and the army... we had an army camp that was like about three and a half miles to the north of Neskowin, which was... and they came down and did their... basically, Proposal Rock was their target practice... they sat on the turn around that was in front of our house and did their rifle... that was their rifle range... they shot at the rock. Still can pick out bullets out of the rock.

Student: *We are very interested in stories, particularly incidents you remember. Pretend you are sitting here with your grandchildren... tell us some stories that you would like them to hear about your life experience or life experiences of your family.*

Verna: Hm... oh, I don't know. I can remember one incident that family and everybody was probably not really expecting us to do, but my... the friend across... a neighbor... he and I one time had come home from school, and we thought there was nothing really to do, so we'll go to the beach. Well, we went down to the beach, and we'd... we'd seen our fathers go down and stand on the rock and watch for fish to come in, and then they would catch 'em... and so, we went down and Gordon walked in the creek in the deeper hole, where our dads usually walked in to get the fish out on to the flat part of the thing when the tide was low, and so Gordon did that, and I was just walking down the beach to see if anything was happening and this lady came running up and saying, "Oh, there's fish, there's fish, there's fish!"

And there were. It was probably the steelhead... it was in the spring.. .and they were laying all over the sandbar, and I had a huge skirt on, and I filled that up... we filled that up with fish, and then Gordon took his pants off and tied knots in the pants legs and stuffed those full... and when we got about half way or better to the house, his dad and my mother met us and asked what we were doing, and we said, "Well, we went fishing." (laughing) And they said, well, let's get 'em and get 'em in the freezer before the game warden comes, or we'll all be in trouble! So, that's just one of the things that happened.

We used to like to go to the park... in the park there was a huge tree stump that had ivy growing up over it... the stump was probably... oh, four or five feet around and ten feet tall, and we used to grab hold of pieces of ivy and swing down... that was our jungle gym! (laughing) So, that was the kind of things we did, or else we went to the horse barn and shoveled manure to be able to ride... if we shoveled enough manure, they let us ride a horse... so...

Mrs. Beaudet: *Do you see a big difference in the way the kids are raised today, as when you were a child going to school?*

Verna: Yeah... they have too much stuff to do... I mean... it's not that far away to some sort of activity other than doing their school work.

Mrs. Beaudet: *Do you see that as a problem?*

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Verna: Yes and no. They need to learn, but then that thing of all of 'em being together sometimes puts problems there that wouldn't be if there were just a couple of kids that played together... I mean, and had some sort of imagination for things... I mean, 'cause we used to just make... take nails and a hammer and make wooden boats and put those on the water on the creek and stuff and float 'em, and that was our entertainment... I mean... and how many kids really do that kind of stuff today... not a lot of 'em... I mean they've got to have something structured or something to... or else they...

Mrs. Beaudet: *Or beeping at 'em...*

Verna: (laughing) Yeah. Right.

Mrs. Beaudet: *Ok... so, you've gone through your questions...*

Student: Yeah...

Mrs. Beaudet: *Do you have anything else you'd like to add for us... about the school, or your life, or...*

Verna: Oh... I don't know... it's been a challenge (laughing)...

Mrs. Beaudet: *Yeah...*

Verna: ... and very interesting, and... I don't know... we at Nestucca have a reunion every summer, the first weekend of August, and everybody... even though you didn't graduate, if you ever attended, you're welcome to come, and we have a ball. There's a picnic at noon on Saturday, and, uh... we usually have a bonfire at the little park that's at the end of Woods Bridge on Saturday night, and sometimes on Friday nights, too...it's just...

Mrs. Beaudet: *Sounds like a good place to get information about the schools, huh?*

Verna: Uh, huh (yes)

Mrs. Beaudet: *Well, maybe I'll talk Mr. Bones into bringing us to that. I was wondering if I could get a picture of you and the guys together... Hilary, shut this off....*

(end of tape)

Transcribed by Darleen Cole
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