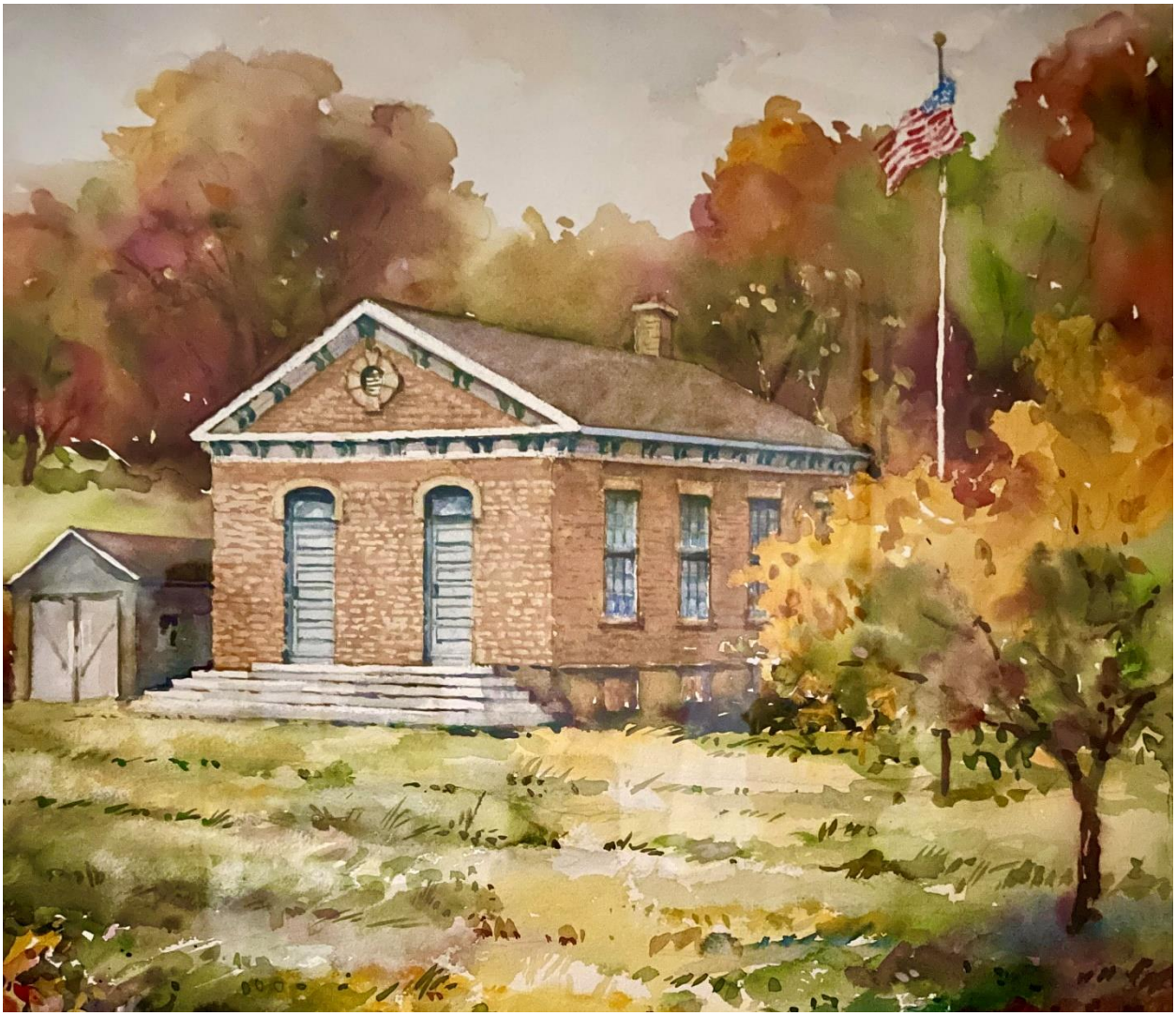
Two

At Stone School, 1957

Sometimes I find myself wishing that the Stone School was still there---at the corner of Breakneck Road and Fond du Lac County Road B---the way it was in the fall of 1957.

Built of Niagara limestone just a few years after Wisconsin became a state and before the Civil War, the school's striking Victorian-era profile featured a proud, quad-keystone oculus at the apex, symbolically positioned to face the east and the morning sun; bold wooden cornices that angled from the soffit and crown to the exterior walls; and eight tall, multi-paned and double-hung windows that were sheltered by polished lintels and supported on protruding windowsills, four facing North and four to the South. The building's exterior had remained essentially unchanged for more than a hundred years before the day that I first walked up its broad platform steps to pass through an imposing, arched-limestone-crested right-hand doorway that emptied into the boys coatroom. An identical, left-side entrance was never opened for as long as I attended the school, a relic of a long-abandoned sense of propriety that dictated separate doorways for boys and girls. With a nod to the symmetrical, neoclassical architectural influence of Thomas Jefferson, the Stone School stood as an icon of mid-nineteenth century Americana, the citadel of a farming community, and a source of pride for the families within a four-square mile perimeter who lived below the Oakfield Ledge, some of whom could trace their lineage to those who helped build the school.



Together, the Walters walked nearly a mile to Stone School: My brother Bobby, in the eighth grade that year, our two school-aged sisters, Peggy and Zelda, and I; four from a large family of which no two siblings could be considered alike nor similarly inclined, an observation most strikingly apparent in the contrast between the two school-aged girls. Peggy, in the sixth-grade, had dark and shining, well-combed shoulder-length hair crowned with signature Mamie Eisenhower bangs. At school, she wore well-kept hand-me-down dresses and shoes that Muma had saved over the years from the four eldest of the Walter children, all girls, who had

made good use of them a decade or more prior and, by 1957, the 1940's styles lent Peggy an aura of maturity well beyond her twelve years. Demure and typically reticent of opinion, when she did speak it was tempered by euphemism or qualification; she was an enigma in sensible shoes. At home, whether by default or accretion, Peggy was Muma's helper, doing pretty much whatever she was asked to do whether she wanted to or not, feeding the chickens every day after school, helping weed the garden during the summer months, washing a sink-full of dirty dishes each night after supper, and repeatedly sweeping and mopping the linoleum floors. Her overarching commission, though, was to keep watch over me and our little sister, who we called Bunny, the youngest of the eleven Walter children. Although conscientious with schoolwork and responsible with housework and taking care of little kids, she wasn't asked to do much, if any, farmwork after backing the tractor through a fence on the lane that led to the cow pasture, dismantling it so properly that Daddy upended whatever he was doing that day to hurriedly mend it and prevent an untoward diaspora of Holsteins down Fond du Lac County Road B.

Zelda, quick-witted and outspoken in the fourth grade, was at that time a suntanned tawny brunette who wore J.C. Penney girls jeans with bold plaid or striped tops. Schoolwork came easily for Zelda but she wasn't particularly inspired by any of it. She shined at recess though, being among the first-picked when designated team captains selected their players for softball, often chosen before those older than she. On inclement-weather days, Zelda spun around the school's basement in a counter-clockwise blaze atop well-oiled clamp-on roller skates while Peggy and her mates played Parcheesi on a folding table in the middle. At home on the farm, Zelda found her bliss working outdoors, driving tractor in the fields and helping

Bobby with whatever chores needed to be done in or around the barn. A maze master already at the age of nine, she ingeniously engineered and directed the construction of complex play tunnels in the loft within the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bales of hay during the June stacking season. Adept of balance and from all outward appearance fearless, she walked across beams from one side of the barn to the other at twenty feet above barren wood flooring. Had the CBS studios possessed the strategic forethought to hold auditions in Waupun, which was about as far afield as any of the Walters got in those days, she could easily have won the gig of stunt double for Ellie Mae Clampett in *The Beverely Hillbillies*. Obliviously, Zelda dragged barn dirt into the house. "Cripes All Friday, Zelda!" Peggy would opine, her voice raised in frustration, "I just got done mopping that floor!"

Up the road to school and back again we Walters trod on County B, regardless of the weather. On bitterly cold days in the winter, the milk truck driver might, if we were lucky, give us a ride to school in the morning; we piled into the cab, shivering and sitting atop one another, fogging up the windshield so badly that Bobby would attempt to wipe it clear with his coat sleeve and on the way home in the worst of blizzards we tried walking backward to keep the freezing Wisconsin wind from our faces. In the best of times, halcyon days in September and October and then again in May with chicory in bloom along the roadside, the walk to and from school was a gift of life for us to enjoy. Amid rolling fields, each day we crossed a crick of crystal-clear water, rippling toward the marsh from an underground spring in the woods to the east, where a large chokecherry tree was surrounded by a profusion of milkweed, burdock, skunk cabbage and other native brush in a meadow-like vale that was home to an unusually friendly and curious bird

that Bobby said was a wild canary who surprised us at moments of its choosing, flashing golden in the sun and bursting into song with a long and variable series of twitters and trills, then repeating a refrain that sounded like, “pēēp'-er!; tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet'.” We watched in awe as it dangled upside down from a wide-arching branch of the chokecherry, like an acrobat from *Cirque du Soleil,* while it pecked seeds from a fully-blossomed purple bud of a bull thistle. When it flew away, it would bob up and down, muttering an encore as if calling attention to the cornflower, “per-chik’-o-ree, per-chik’-o-ree;” and whether or not it was the same wild canary that entertained us that year and returned year after year thereafter, it seems to me now that that bird was a sentinel of the crick who found sustenance there, recognized and did not fear us, delighted us, and first caused us to understand that beauty can be found anywhere.

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At six years old, I was more than ready to go to school. There was no kindergarten in the rural schools of Fond du Lac County in the 1950’s, so much of what I had learned up to that age was gleaned from watching television. In the mornings, Captain Kangaroo read books like *Make Way for Ducklings* and *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* and I became good at listening to stories. In the evenings, I could pick up adult-level vocabulary words and even learn a bit about geography and current events from Chet Huntley and David Brinkley while watching the *NBC Nightly News*, but it was on Saturday mornings that my effort to understand the relative magnitude of numbers was completely flummoxed by watching *American Bandstand* and trying to understand the ratings that were assigned to the new songs that Dick Clark introduced, and all I could figure

out was that 75 is greater than 55 because it had a good beat and you could dance to it.

I know the date that I started school as clearly as if a 1957 Bank of Oakfield calendar still hangs from a nail in the wall before me: It was Wednesday, September 4th. As the Walters set out from home that morning---Zelda, Peggy, Bobby and I---apace and to the north, my excitement was palpable, and when we approached the school, it seemed like other kids converged in unison from all directions. Up the platform steps, over the time-worn limestone threshold and through the open right-hand doorway---no one stopped in the coatroom to hang up a coat or a sweater that day---we entered the classroom in a rush of noise and excitement where four rows of desks were already arranged by deliberate design with the smallest desks toward the front and the largest desks at the rear of the room. Each desk had a name card made of colored construction paper taped to the upper right-hand corner. As I found my desk in the excitement and surveyed the room, everything looked incredibly tall to me---the doorway, the windows, the bookshelves and cabinets---and spanning the room and high above the desks, six milk-glass, pendant-globe schoolhouse lights hung on black chains intertwined with electrical wiring, suspended from canopies of molded Plaster-of-Fond du Lac rosette medallions that graced the fifteen-foot-high ceiling. I looked up.

"This is the most spectacular room I've ever seen" I exclaimed with wide-open eyes and freshly-brushed, but uneven, wide-spaced teeth.

"Spectacular!" Miss Schmidt homed-in on me with surprise, "Oh Ricky, I just love your words," and in a moment, when I lowered my eyes

from the ceiling to meet hers, we connected. Tall, slender, and as enchanting to me as Julie Andrews in *Cinderella*, she echoed my excitement; it was her very first day of school too, though as a teacher, and twenty years young.

That was almost seventy Septembers ago, and school was very different then. At the front of the classroom sat a table, rectangular and low, surrounded by a mix of chairs of different styles, heights, hardwoods, wear-marks, and levels of comfort. The tallest of the chairs, behind the table and facing the classroom---heavy in weight and centered in front of a pair of slate boards that were, for some reason, called blackboards even though they looked green to me---was reserved for Miss Schmidt. From her chair at the head of the classroom, Miss Schmidt would call students to her table, "Grade Two Reading," or "Grade Six Math," and children would gather together for lessons, in groups of two, three, or four.

It was at Miss Schmidt's table that we learned to read using the *Alice and Jerry* reading series that featured stories about a brother and sister, their dog named Jip, and of rural life in a fictious farming community called Hastings Mills and the neighboring Friendly Village. In our group of four first-graders, Miss Schmidt taught us the sounds that letters and groups of letters make, and then we progressed to sounding out words and connecting them into short sentences such as, *Go, Jip, go!* and by the end of the school year as we gained in confidence and phonetic ability, she had us reading short stories aloud.

As the *Alice and Jerry* series progressed through the grades, the reader's imagination was taken far away from Hastings Mills to lands afar. Because I sat so near to the table at the front of the classroom, I was able to

listen to the second-, third-, and fourth-graders as they read orally, and by listening became exposed to increasingly more difficult reading vocabulary words so that when I was in the next-subsequent grades I was already familiar with the stories and, from context, understood the vocabulary words, which made reading the stories easy. It was fun to listen to the older kids read and imagine the things and places that they were reading about. A favorite book to listen to was *If I Were Going*, the third-grade reader about the Friendly Village stationmaster named Mr. Sanders who collected pictures and talked about places he wanted to see and the exciting things he wanted to do someday--like herding reindeer in Lapland!

Every month, a large oblong and heavy box was delivered to the school that contained an assortment of books from the county rural school library program. Lifting the lid off the durable set-up box, we gathered to examine the treasures inside. We each selected a book, signed the book card that was in a pocket glued to the inside of the front cover and gave it to Miss Schmidt who kept the cards in the top left-hand drawer of her desk, and we enjoyed reading the books during our seatwork time, returning them to Miss Schmidt as soon as we finished so we could select another. The arrival of each box came amid great anticipation and curiosity, its contents treated like a gift, and perhaps helps explain why there were so many who found the joys of reading at Stone School.

With eight grades to teach, Miss Schmidt was frequently engaged at the table with small group instruction, so the rest of the students needed to work and learn independently. When questions arose or help was needed outside of a small group lesson, it was the generally accepted practice to ask a more capable student, usually one who was a year or more older; the

older child typically obliged, but we instinctively knew whom to seek out. Bobby, being approachable and already beginning to exhibit the form of an adult, knowing pretty much everything that was to be learned at Stone School and almost always willing to help, fielded more than his share of questions from the younger kids and cultivated for himself a role as a student leader; that, in recognition of his helpfulness, afforded him with the most enviable of all duties---taking out the trash to the burn barrel behind the school and setting it aflame.

Everyone had duties, and Miss Schmidt would make rotating assignments weekly, which were always carried out willingly; this is how we learned civic responsibility. It was *our* school and we were expected to take care of it and to help in any way we could. A duty was assigned to each student according to his or her level of ability, and there was a job for everyone, even if it was emptying out the shavings from the pencil sharpener. Milk was delivered to the school in individual glass bottles, and passing out the cold treat from the refrigerator at the back of the classroom was a sought-after duty by many because if there was an occasional extra chocolate milk at the end of the week, one of the milk-passers scored it.

Zelda beamed with pride when she was assigned the duty of raising the flag up the flagpole in the morning or taking it down and folding it into a triangle at the end of the school day, a ritual always performed in pairs so that the flag never touched the ground. There was no such thing as a custodian at Stone School, so Peggy took her turn at cleaning the chalkboards, washing them with a bucket of water so that they were perfectly clean without a hint of chalk dust on the slate or in the chalk tray beneath and, because she was good at it, she was called upon to sweep the

floor with such regularity that she barely passed the scoliosis screening by the end of the school year. I liked distributing the goiter pills, which were routinely dispensed to children in schools before iodine was added to salt, and while almost everyone seemed to enjoy eating them because they tasted pretty good, sort of a malt flavor, if anyone refused their pill, I was instructed to show them the label affixed to the back of the wide-mouthed, blue glass pill bottle that included a picture of a lady with an enlarged thyroid beneath her chin the size of a honey-dew melon.

Care of the school was a community duty and the parents of Stone School modeled responsibility for its upkeep. They gathered together for an evening at the school, at least a couple of times a year, ostensibly for what they said were card parties to play Sheepshead, but they never left without taking a look about to see if the windows needed to be washed or if something needed to be fixed or painted, and deciding, amongst themselves, who would take care of it. Everyone did their part.

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A photographer was coming to Stone School to take everyone's picture! At home in the farmhouse early that morning, and on the footboard of the double bed that I shared with Bobby, Muma had laid out a shirt for me to wear, one that she liked. A hand-me-down that had made its way through three older brothers, it was secondhand before that, thoughtfully passed along to Muma more than a decade earlier by her sister from Milwaukee after one of our cousins had outgrown it.

With all the anticipation about picture day and the pandemonium of at least a half-dozen kids jockeying for some private time in the new indoor

bathroom that was installed that summer and Peggy vacillating about which was her better dress to wear, the Walters were among the last to get to school and just about everyone was already seated in the classroom. In the boys coatroom, as I unzipped and hung up my coat there was only one other straggler, a boy older than me, Butch Klankendorf. He noticed the shirt that Muma had dressed me in and commented, "I've got a shirt just like that." Pleased that one of the big boys would talk to me and flattered that I had a shirt like his, I smiled at him. "Really?" I asked, not realizing that he had baited me. "Yeah," he lit pejoratively, "I wear it in the barn" and, with an odious smug on his face, he turned to enter the classroom, leaving me alone.

For a moment I stayed in the coatroom, stunned, with tears starting to well in my eyes. Why did he say that? Was there something wrong with my shirt? Why was he picking on me? And when I had sufficiently pulled myself together to walk into the classroom and toward my seat, Butch stared right at me, his eyes defining his face, piercing my approach like two searing suns.

Until that day, I hadn't felt poor. Within the cocoon of the Walter family, I'd never experienced privation, and, essentially isolated from a wider world, I was oblivious to the fact that some kids had newer and perhaps better clothes and naive to knowledge of other families having greater wherewithal. On picture day, Butch delivered a message that changed that; out of earshot from Bobby, and any of the others for that matter, he found a target for hectoring, mocked me for what I wore and, in turn, I developed self-consciousness, harbored doubt, and avoided him.

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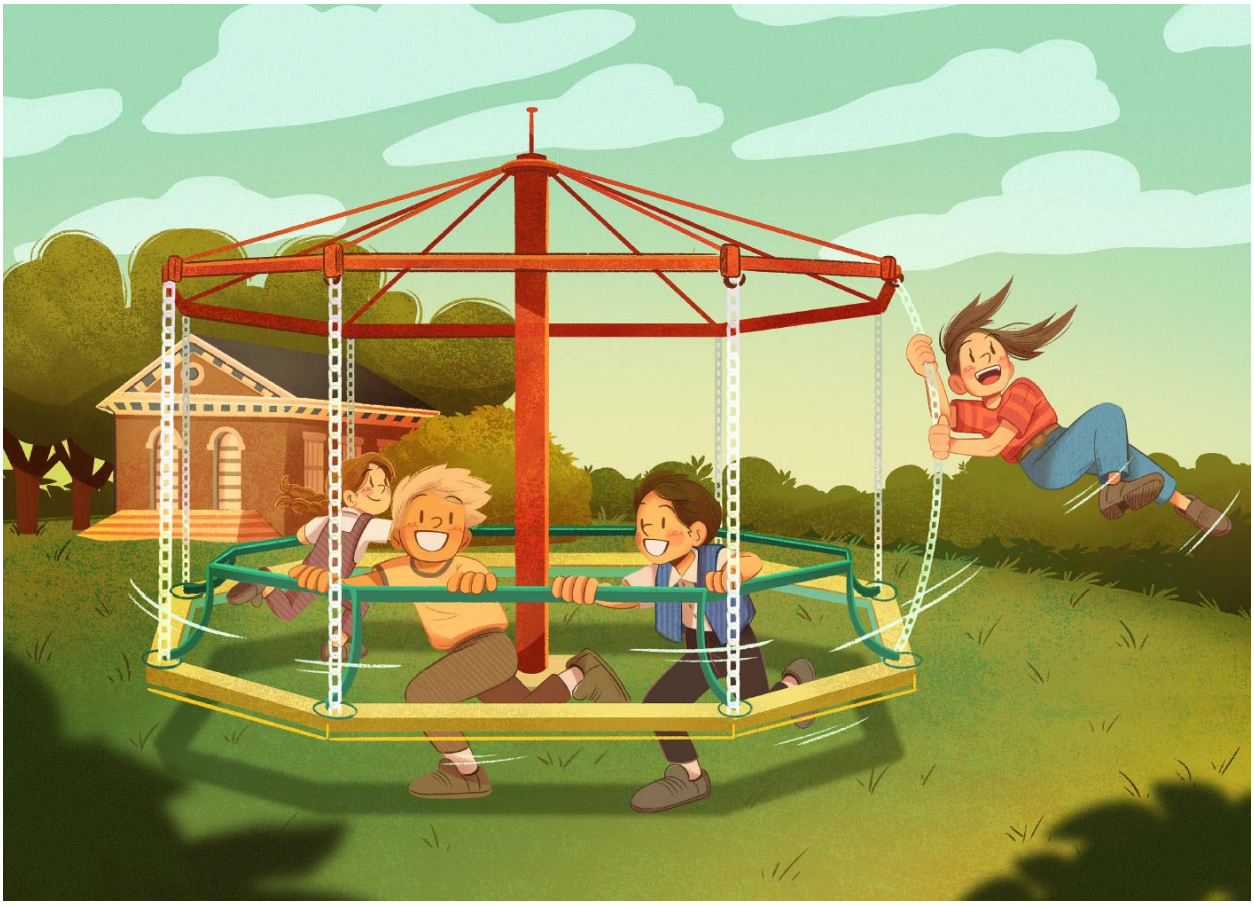
Because farm kids always had chores to do at home and the nearest age-mate sometimes lived a mile or more away, usually the only time we had other kids to play with was at school recess. There was a fifteen-minute recess break in the morning, another 15 minutes in the afternoon, and at noon---when Bobby got up to pull my desk down the aisle to sit next to him because we shared a lunch bucket---we all hurriedly ate our lunches so that we could maximize the greater part of an hour for fun.

A hill in a field directly behind the school provided an engrossing opportunity for sledding in the wintertime. Almost every Wisconsin country kid had a sled in those days, and at Stone School we all brought them along to slide down that slope, over and over again, no matter how cold it was nor how much ice collected on our faces, and we were always disappointed when the classmate who had stayed behind in the schoolhouse for the bell-ringing duty broached the cold air just long enough shake the bell up and down, with a sharp and piercing pattern of double clangs, so that the kids afield would notice. When the weather got just barely above freezing so that the sledding wasn't as good, the snow packed tightly and we had energetic snowball fights instead.

When it rained miserably, we retreated to the school basement for roller-skating or playing 45 rpm rock-and-roll records with dancing, which almost everyone tried at least once. "Play some more Elvis, whydon'tcha?" Zelda would predictably blurt out, because she could never get enough of jiggling her body, arms flailing in the air, dancing with herself in the middle of the basement to *All Shook Up*.

On the school grounds there sat a swing set with a trapeze bar, a slide that we made as slippery as possible by rubbing wax paper on its stainless steel platform, a see-saw that we called a tetter-totter, and the most remarkable merry-go-round that I have ever seen, consisting of an iron-spiked upper frame in the form of a eight-pointed star that mimicked the canopy of a circus carousel, it's center-point sleeved over a well-polished center post, from which eight, five-foot long welded-link chains hung that supported an octagonal wooden seating bench with metal-pipe interior handrails. On the inside, as many as eight kids would push the handrails in a circle as fast as their legs could propel them and the merry-go-round to peak speed; then Zelda would stand upright, grasping her hands to the chain to let her legs sweep aloft, propelled through the wind, her body flying parallel to the ground, and when the pushers got tired and the speed



began to slow just a bit to let her know that the thrill, like all good things, would come to an end, let go of her grasp at a strategically-chosen moment so that her body flew outward to land sideways into the downslope of the ditch on Breakneck Road. In as many times that Zelda performed that feat, she never once broke a bone, scraped an elbow, or even incurred a bruise.

With warm and sunny weather, we played games like Tag and Red Rover in the school yard, but there was nothing more emblematic of who we were then as the softball games we played at Stone School. Typically, Bobby and one of the other older kids declared themselves as team captains, one threw up a bat between them for the other to catch, then to alternately place fist over fist upward toward the top of the bat to determine who would make the first pick of team players, and because we barely had enough for two teams, everyone who wanted to play was included, no matter how young or inexperienced. Modifications were made to any aspect of the game to make it work. Our playing field was irregular, could hardly be called a diamond shape with the distance between bases unequal, but that didn't matter. A bare spot in the grass served as home plate, the trunk of an oak tree near the ditch on County Road B was first base, a matted-down patch of clover was second base, and third base was the cement billow of the flagpole; the stars and stripes fluttered above us. When at bat, we first-graders were allowed to swing as many times as needed to land a hit and when we did so, our team members cheered for us to *run, run, run!* In the outfield, the little kids could throw the ball at a runner, if the runner was older, and if the runner was hit by the ball, he or she was out. Nobody owned a softball glove and the game began with morning recess, continued after lunch, and finished with the clang of the afternoon

recess bell when the captains declared the score for the day as we walked up the broad steps and over the threshold, through the boys coatroom and back into the classroom; and no matter the outcome, everyone seemed happy because playing softball at Stone School wasn't about winning, it was all about having fun.

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Whereas the art experience at Stone School was uninspiringly limited, consisting of little more than unstructured experimentation with modeling clay, drawing with colored pencils, cutting reams of construction paper into strips to make paper chains and eating paste, the music curriculum was truly imaginative. Each Wednesday at 1:30, Miss Schmidt would approach the radio that sat atop a bookcase at the rear of the classroom, and with a distinct clicking sound that cued our attention as she turned the knob to *on*, adjusted the volume and then fidgeted a bit with the semi-circular dial to make sure that it was tuned as clearly as possible to the airwave signal for 970 and we joined thousands of rural school kids from across the state for *Let's Sing!*---a program of the Wisconsin School of the Air and WHA public radio in Madison. At our desks, holding saddle-stitched soft-cover songbooks that contained musical scores, pen-and-ink illustrations and lyrics, we listened attentively to stories of the human experience, of people from both near and far, and imagined, through song, what life might have been like in earlier times or distant places. We sang expressively and without self-consciousness, at times so loudly that we may have rattled loose a window pane or two, with a spirit that I think now was characteristic of the way that a schoolhouse full of country kids could be and often were, captivated by a tune and enjoying the lyrics, each child

becoming, for a moment, someone outside of the self, far away from the middle of nowhere, part of a song, such as:

> Once a jolly swagman camped by a billabong,
> Under the shade of a Coolibah tree.
> He sang as he watched and waited 'til his Billy boiled,
> "You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me."
>
> "Waltzing, Matilda,
> Waltzing, Matilda,
> You'll come a-waltzing Matida with me."
>
> He sang as he watched and waited 'til his Billy boiled,
> "You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me."

We sang Waltzing Matilda for ourselves and of ourselves, and Miss Schmidt sang, too. We loved that song so much that Zelda suggested it be included it in the upcoming Christmas program, an annual event where adults gathered to see and hear the kids perform holiday carols in a celebration of community. "That's not a Christmas song!" Butch Klankendorf objected; but Zelda fired right back, annoyed at his reproach of her idea, "It can be if we want it to be!" and Butch backed down, rebuffed by Zelda. Harboring more than a bit of doubt, because the success of the annual Christmas program was a reflection on the teacher, Miss Schmidt reluctantly agreed with Zelda.

On the eve of the winter solstice, parents and kids alike gathered for the Christmas program. The students had already decorated a Christmas tree and transformed the classroom into a little theatre. As far as any of the adults knew, everything was transpiring just as it always had, a tradition of each and every year at Stone School for more than one hundred years---except if there was a plague or a blizzard---with recitations, solos, duets,

trios and larger ensembles of students singing time-honored holiday carols; but, for the 1957 finale, all of the eighteen kids assembled in front of the classroom, with the smallest in front and bigger kids behind them, facing the parents who sat expectantly on chocolate-colored folding chairs; and as Miss Schmidt played a rousing piano prelude the foreheads of the adults furled in puzzlement, then, on cue and with piano accompaniment, we kids burst into an enthusiastic and refrain-swaying performance of Waltzing Matilda, all four stanzas sung perfectly from memory, finished with an exuberant flourish and our young hearts joined through song, hands linked in a synchronized bow and Miss Schmidt with a smile of pride on her face, our production rewarded by a jubilant round of applause, with Daddy and Butch's dad and some of the other men rising to stand and clap more loudly, smiles and expressions of surprise, delight, and endearment on all of the farm-worn adult faces like subjects in a Norman Rockwell painting--- a flashbulb memory that captured the best of everyone who was a part of the Stone School in 1957.

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1958 arrived and eventually so did Spring. In February I had turned seven, and as was the custom with the Walters, each family member was recognized with a cake on his or her birthday. So it was to my surprise, on April 20th of that year and shortly before noon, that Muma suddenly appeared at school and in the doorway that led from the boys coatroom into the classroom. Wearing a long spring coat and her head covered with a scarf that was tied neatly under her chin, she held a 9 x 13" aluminum cakepan in which she had baked a carrot cake, frosted with a cream cheese garnish, and decorated on top with chopped hickory nuts. "Happy Birthday,

Miss Schmidt," is all that I can remember that she said because, as Miss Schmidt approached her, Peggy arose from her seat like a well-rehearsed acolyte, interceded for the two adults who were now speaking to one another, took possession of the offering and placed it in the center of the table at the front of the classroom so that Miss Schmidt could share a few words with Muma while she took her hands, and then the two women turned from each other, Muma out the door through the coatroom with Daddy waiting in the truck outside, and Miss Schmidt toward a window, where the sun streamed down like a blessing, to wipe a tear from her eye as she watched Muma and Daddy drive away, southward toward the marsh and back to the farm; the eighteen kids sang Happy Birthday to Miss Schmidt, and Peggy cut the cake.

At seven, kids don't understand or appreciate everything, and maybe not much, but that day I knew that Miss Schmidt was a respected person in the Stone School community, and particularly among the Walters.

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The waning days of April melded into May and the chicory again bloomed along the roadside of County Road B as Peggy, Zelda, and I walked home from school one day shortly before the school year would come to a close. Bobby had ridden his bicycle to school that morning and after school he lighted off on it, propelled by anticipation, eager to finish his chores so that he could go to the Oakfield Village Park for the high school baseball game that evening. Bobby hoped that he could talk to the coach; Stone School was almost in the rear-view mirror for him now.

As my sisters and I approached the crick we cast our eyes about, searching the branches of the chokecherry tree, but the wild canary was not there. Amid the void and from seemingly out of the blue, Zelda spewed, "Butch Klankendorf threw a cat off the top of their silo." Horrified at the thought, because I liked cats and couldn't comprehend such cruelty to an animal, I felt my stomach tighten and withdrew into a doleful silence, my eyes cast downward, trying as best that I could to think of nothing but placing one foot in front of the other. "Don't you go over there Ricky," Peggy demanded, she warned me, "If Butch Klankendorf would throw a cat off the top of a silo, he'd throw you off too!"

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The passage of decades can inspire us to invite listeners to gather at the hearth and tell some sort of story. Time expires, loved ones depart and the world changes, but the life we lived long ago still beats deep within us like a second heart, a home for reflection and expanse of the soul. A wild canary, once sighted, watched and listened to is a joy forever; and the Stone School can still be found at the corner of Breakneck Road and Fond du Lac County Road B---the way it was in the fall of 1957---until the last person who can remember it is gone. There we realize that the greatest acts of kindness can come from those with the least of means and humblest of hearts. When we go to that home and view our younger selves at a distance, like a character in a story and from a perspective of hindsight and accumulated wisdom we didn't have when we first lived those days, we can more fully understand the course and character of our lives as a long plot that unfolded from the care, companionship, and example of others who walked along with us on the road of our formative years, and what matters most, in the end, is that we lived it together.

End Notes, *At Stone School, 1957*

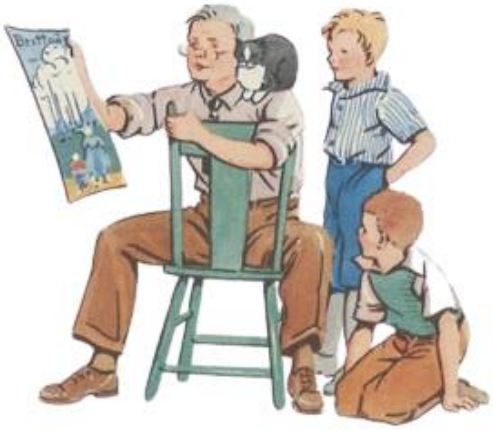
The **Stone School** was built at about the same time and of the same harvest of Niagara limestone, quarried by James C. Wells and Company, that was used to build the first permanent, and still-existing, structure of the Waupun State Prison in 1854. Upon consolidation with the Oakfield School District, Stone School closed forever in May of 1963.

Because of their bright yellow plumage, beautiful songs, and playful nature, the **American Goldfinch** is sometimes called a wild canary. A symbol of joy and happiness, the sight of an American Goldfinch often brings awe, and it is said that watching one helps develop a positive attitude. These delightful birds are migratory to Wisconsin and can live for up to seven years, returning faithfully each summer to the same location.

In September of 1957, **Lorena Schmidt** began her teaching career at Stone School. She taught there for three years before joining the US Navy, marrying in Hawaii while in the miliary, and subsequently returned and taught elementary school in nearby LeRoy, Wisconsin. She died in 2018 and, according to her obituary, Lorena famously loved to make and share carrot cake to celebrate special occasions.

Chicory, also known as cornflower or blue dandelion, was brought to America by European settlers. It is drought-tolerant and prefers limestone-rich disturbed soil, such as along roadsides, where bees and butterflies feed upon it. Chicory does not typically invade undisturbed soil. The whole plant is edible and has historically been used as a coffee substitute.

Those who study the prospective mood of the country suggest that **1957** was the happiest year in memory. The American people, having endured decades of austerity, no longer went without and were happy with what they had. Black and white televisions were affordable then but the turn toward consumerism that defined the subsequent decades was not yet the norm. A strong sense of community and belonging existed. The story narrator (**Ricky**) is shown in this 1957 photo from picture day at Stone School.



The **Alice and Jerry** reading series was popular in rural schools from the 1930's to the early 1960's. Written by Mabel O'Donnell, the stories are derived from her childhood experiences growing up on a farm near East Aurora, Illinois. The books were illustrated by Florence and Margaret Hoopes, such as this artwork from *If I Were Going*.

Waltzing Matilda is a folk ballad that tells the story of a man in the bush country of Queensland, Australia who carries his belongings in a sack swung over his shoulder that he affectionately refers to as Matilda and his walk-about as waltzing. A piano prelude of the melody and refrain, much like that played by Miss Schmidt for the finale of the 1957 Christmas program at Stone School, can be heard by clicking here.